

## How Does God Change a Family?

- If you've got a Bible, go to Genesis 11. We're looking at this great book of the Bible. This is actually sermon number 10 in Genesis, and the best way to really figure out how to live your life is to look at the life of somebody else. There's kind of two ways to learn lessons. You can learn 'em the hard way by figuring it out for yourself. You can learn it the easy way by letting somebody else figure out and tell you how to do it. Every generation, when it comes to marriage and parenting and life and leadership, there's all these fads and trends. But the truth is you don't really know if it's a good or a bad idea until it's been field tested for a while. This is why we tend to love biographies. We look at the lives and legacies of people and we ask, well, what did they do? And then how did it end? And what were the complications or implications of the decisions that they made for generations? This is why on television, we've even got a whole channel dedicated to biographies. And in the biography channel, it's about people who made decisions that led to blessing or cursing for generations. Well, what we're gonna do today, we're gonna study one of the most significant people in the history of the world. Genesis is the beginning of the biography of a married couple named Abram and Sarai. God's ultimately gonna change their name to Abraham and Sarah. And sometimes when you have such a radical life change that everything pivots and is altered by God, God actually changes your name to just remind you, you're not who you were, you're someone new, and you don't live like you used to live, you're gonna live a brand new life. So Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah. Later on Cephas becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul. Abraham's name means father. And that had to be a bit of a sting because he was childless, his wife was barren, but his name meant father, but he had no child. His wife, Sarah, her name means princess. So she's high maintenance. She's like a lot of shoes, a lot of purses, a lot of hair foil, some extensions. Those are not really her eyelashes. A lot of... No, I did the work. It's the Hebrew word for Scottsdale. She was a... Princess. She was a lot going on there. And so anyways, we just lost all the women, and the men are nodding their heads going, yeah, that's why my kids can't go to college. We spent all the money. So, this is Abraham and Sarah, and they are one of the most significant couples in the history of the world and in the Bible. From Genesis 11 through 25 where we pick it up today, they're gonna be center stage and in their wake, now, they are mentioned in 11 books of the New Testament, including all four gospels. And there are three major world religions that say we are following Abraham and Sarah. That would be Judaism as well as Islam, as well as Christianity. And so it's hard to overstate their impact in history. And Jesus comes along in the New Testament. He says, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And you're gonna get to know this family and this legacy as we study Genesis together. But just to begin, I want you to know that God works generationally, and so does Satan. That God wants to bless generationally, and Satan wants to curse generationally. So we need to think in terms of generation, and not just our life, but our legacy. And the themes of blessing and cursing appear about 80 times in Genesis, one of the most packed books of the Bible talking about blessing and cursing. And part of the problem that we have in our day, we think very shortsighted, not very long term. We think very selfishly, we don't think generationally. And Genesis wants to re-hardwire us to think in terms of generational legacy, and not just the lives that we live, but the legacies that we leave. I'll give you an example right now, our country true or false, we have a lot of debt. And everybody's like, oh, free money. It's not free. You're stealing it from your kids

and your grandkids. And see, we don't think in those terms 'cause we don't think about the people that aren't here yet. And the Bible says that a wise man leaves an inheritance for his children's children. Well, the converse would be a fool leaves debt for his children's children. And so God wants us to think in terms of generational legacy. And to do that, we're gonna jump into Genesis 11, and there we learn that blessing and cursing lasts for generations. And here we're gonna look at a family lineage. This is a genealogy. And it's showing that certain generations bless the next generation, certain generations curse the next generation. Genesis 11:10-26. These are the generations of Shem. So Noah had three sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth. Ham's line was cursed. Shem and Japheth's were blessed. Ultimately through Shem is going to come Jesus Christ. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad. How many of you are glad you didn't start your family at 100? I'm 51. I can't imagine in 49 years, me and a kid wearing a diaper. That's a lot right there. When Shem was 100 years old, and I don't know how to say these names 'cause I went to public school and I'm not a morning person, but I will just say them confident and fast, Arpachshad, two years after the flood. And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad, 500 years, and had other sons and daughters. When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah, a girl's name. And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah, 4003 years, had other sons and daughters. When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber 403 years, had other sons and daughters. When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg. Eber lived after he fathered Peleg, 430 years, had other sons and daughters. When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu, and Peleg lived after he fathered Reu, 209 years, had other sons and daughters. When Reu lived 32 years, he fathered Serug, and Reu lived, he fathered Serug 207 years, had other sons and daughters. One last slide here in the Hebrew phone book, when Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. Serug lived after he fathered Nahor, 200 years, had other sons and daughters. When Nahor lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. Here's the big idea. This is where it was all going. And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 119 years, had other sons and daughters. When Terah lived 70 years, he fathered him, Abram, or Abraham, Nahor and Haran. So what we see here is that Genesis has three big movements. Genesis one through four was Adam and his son Seth. And then it was Noah and his son Shem. And then here it's gonna be Abram and his son Isaac. So it's moving through three major periods in human history where God is working to bring salvation to humanity. And these genealogies, Genesis 5, Genesis 10, Genesis 11, they're genealogies, and it's just like us. We like to study our family history or our genealogy. This would've been for God's people, the Hebrews, this would've been their family genealogy in history. And if you put Genesis 5, 10, and 11 together, it's all one genealogy with commentary in the middle, explaining each generations and the decisions that they make. A few things here, the lifespans start to get shorter because as sin increases, the length of life decreases. God does this out of love for us. If we are sinful, the longer we live, the better we get at doing bad things. So God shortens life out of love for us. In addition, in previous genealogies, he said he died, he died, he died, he died. Here, it doesn't emphasize death, but the next generation, and the hope of a future possibility that is improved. And as we read this, we get a little bored with it. But I want you to know that all scripture is God breathed and profitable. And if this was your family, you'd be really excited. And the good news is this, God knows us by name. God knows everybody's name. Now you and I, we tend to go through life and we spend a lot of time in

places where no one knows our name. And we really like walking into a room where people know our name. And if we come to church or we find ourselves hanging out at a coffee shop and someone says our name, that's nice. It means they know us. They love us. They pay attention to us, and they call us by name. God calls you by name. God calls all of his children by name. And that's so good to know. In addition, when Jesus returns and there is the resurrection of the dead, he's gonna call you from your grave by name. That's amazing to just consider. He does this, Jesus does with a guy named Lazarus. He died and then he showed up to the grave side. Jesus did, and said Lazarus come forth. He called him by name. God calls you for salvation by name. God calls you by resurrection for name. And in addition to this first book of the Bible, there is another list, told you last week in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, and there's another list there, it's called the Lamb's book of life. And in it are written the names of all of the people who are loved by Jesus and saved by Jesus. And it's amazing to think that there's another list. And if you know Jesus, your name is on that list. Okay? And what you want is you want your kid's name on that list. Amen? And your grandkid's name on that list. And that's basically the heart of what's going on here in Genesis. It's saying there were generations and their names were all on the list. Now that being said, some of us come from family lines that aren't that great. Some of us, it's been generations of cursing, not blessing. The decisions that were made that caused a lot of pains and problems and perils. And sometimes it almost feels inevitable that you're gonna repeat the problems of your family. But if you do have a bad family, a bad family line, a bad legacy, the point is it doesn't need to continue. God can save you. God can change you. God can take you out of your family. He can adopt you into his family, and he can start a brand new family line through you. That's the story of Abraham and Sarah. So we picked that up next. For good to start, bad must end. Genesis 11:27-32. Now these are the generations of Terah. So Terah's Abraham's dad. Terah fathered Abraham, Nahor and Haran. Here's the big idea, Terah, bad guy, Nahor, bad guy, Haran, bad guy, Abraham, bad guy, but God's gonna change him. That's the good news. It doesn't matter who your brothers are, who your father is. If you meet God, you get a fresh clean start. And Haran fathered Lot. He's gonna show up prominently for quite a bit in Genesis. He is a lot of problems. He is a lot of drama. He is a lot of issues. He has baggage and carry on. Some of you have relatives like that. And if they're here with you, don't raise your hand. Haran died in the presence of his father, Terah, in the land of his kindred. So Haran is Abram's grandfather. Think of your dad. Think of your granddad. In the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans. Now there is a debate on this. I believe this is Babylon. These are the same bad people that tried to build the city of Babylon and the tower of Babylon. And Abraham and Nahor took wives. The name of Abraham's wife was Sarai. The name of Nahor's wife, Milcah. So if you're married, think about your spouse, your dad, your granddad, your brothers and then their spouses. The daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren, can't have kids. Some of you know the pain of this, you really want to have a family and you are infertile or you keep miscarrying, it's hardship, it's difficult. It's heartbreak. She had no child. Terah took Abraham his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, his son Abraham's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. So they're making the journey, and they stopped, maybe because the men are older and they can't make the full journey. The days of Terah were 205 years and

Terah died in Haran. Now we read this, and we tend to think Abraham is this magnificent man of faith. He's constantly listed in the Bible as kind of a hero of the faith. And it says, for example, in Hebrews 11, there's this great list of people who had tremendous faith. Most people get one verse, which is amazing. Moses gets six, Abraham gets 12. And we look at his life and his legacy. And we think he must have been an incredible guy, must have come from an incredible family. Actually, he was just a normal guy from a normal family. And the point is this, it doesn't matter where you start. Once God intersects your life, it can change very significantly for generations. But the issue here is this, he starts as a Babylonian in Babylon. And if you were with us last week, we looked earlier in Genesis, there were a bunch of people who came together, and they decided we're gonna build a great city to make our name great, it was Babylon. And in it, they were gonna create the tower of Babel to go up and kind of replace God and have the first attempt at a human secular society without God. And their thought was we're gonna have heaven on earth without God. They're literally godless. They're literally godless. And God says, no, you're gonna do evil. So I'm gonna scatter you and confuse your languages. Those Babylonian people included this family. They were no better than anyone else. They were no different than anyone else. This is like a repeat of the days of Noah. Said in Genesis 6, everyone was only evil all the time, that included Noah, but Noah found grace or favor in the eyes of God. And God said, you know what? Everybody's bad, but I'm gonna love you and I'm gonna love your family, and we're gonna try and do some things differently with you and your family. God is doing the same thing here with Abram. He's going to pick just a regular Babylonian guy. And he is in Ur, that's modern day basically Iraq, of the Chaldeans. And these are the bad guys that hate God in the Old Testament. And in this city of Babylon, they worshiped the moon goddess. They were worshipping demons. These were not great people. And archeology tells us that they were developed in advance. They had plumbing and technology and urbanization. So again, what we see is all of the progress is external, not internal. This is the progressive myth of evolution, we're getting better. No, no. We're getting more effective at doing evil. Just because we're making improvements externally doesn't mean we're making improvements internally. But what's happening here, he and his family are moving, and they're moving basically to what is the modern day border of Syria and Turkey. It's basically where they move. It's maybe 300 miles. It's a massive move. I've actually been to this place. I tried to get to this place. I was on the Turkish side of the border, and I hiked up kind of in a forbidden area. Don't tell 'em, but I tried to hike up to get as close to this area as I could. And as soon as I got near the Syrian border, I was told, be careful, you're now within sniper range. I was like, oh, so there's still some issues in this part of the world, I'm happy to testify, but that's where they found themselves. Now, when it comes to Abraham, most of us would think, well, he was a Jewish guy who loved God. And the fact is he didn't start as a Jewish guy, and he didn't start as a guy who loved God. And here's the big idea. Sometimes when you see a person at the finish line of their life, you're so excited, but you'll be really excited if you look at the starting line. Don't just look at how someone finishes if they finish well, look at how they start. And oftentimes they start right where you and I start, a bad family, a bad legacy, a total mess, a lot of confusion. What I'm gonna share with you next is probably gonna cause your mind to melt. If you kind of grew up in church, you're a little bit religious, and it's really amazing where God starts with Abraham. Here's what we've learned, that Abraham started as a pagan Gentile. Now we tend to think of

him as a Jewish believer. But before that he was a pagan Gentile. Joshua 24:2, Joshua said to the people, thus says the Lord, that God out of Israel, that's Jesus Christ, long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates. Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, and they, the father and the sons, what? Served other gods. He was in Babylon worshiping demons. Babylon is sort of the Bible's language for as bad as it gets. Throughout the Bible, Babylon is just, that's demonic. It's evil, it's a cult. They do horrible things. They hate God. They hate God's people. And this language for gods is not real gods, it's demons who pose and pretend to be God, they fake it. Everything God creates, Satan counterfeits. And so the counterfeit of God or false gods. And various religions and spirituality will have tremendous supernatural power. You're like, well, I prayed my prayer, God answered, it may have been a demon. Well, I got a vision, I got a revelation, I saw an aura, something supernatural happened. The Bible says don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, because not every spirit comes from God, the holy spirit, they're unholy spirits as well. And what demons will do, they will answer your prayers to damn your soul. So the goal is this, you don't want to just get from God. You want to get God. Because at the end of the day, if you're praying to a demon, and they answer your prayer, what they're saying is I will trade anything for your soul. That's his family. His dad is a pagan. He's a pagan. His brothers are pagans. They're worshiping and serving demons. And what's amazing about this, they're in Babylon. So they're no better or different than anyone else who got scattered and had their languages confused. And you think about it. Most of the time, when we think of God working through someone, we think kind of in terms of sports, interview sports fans. In sports, let's say you're gonna draft an athlete. Let's say you've got a first round draft pick. You're gonna take the best athlete. And we tend to think of that way. Well, if God's gonna work through Abraham, he must be a first round draft pick. Nope. He's actually the opposite. If you think about it, he's from, well, he has a bad father. His dad is demonic, and his family's demonic, and his brothers are demonic, and he's from a bad culture. He's from Babylon. And he's a guy who doesn't know the Lord. And he's also got a marriage problem. Let me say this, every marriage has at least one problem. Wives are all nodding their head. They're like, yeah, it's called the husband. But every marriage has one big obstacle or problem that it needs to overcome. It could be a health problem. It could be an injury. It could be a financial crisis. It could be a wayward child. It could be barrenness. It could be the in-laws. Every marriage has an obstacle, a hardship. There's this, they can't have kids, they're barren. How can you have a legacy if you can't have children? In addition, the reason that Abraham would not be a first round draft pick, he's 75 years old. How many of you know that's old? How many of you, you're like, I wanna change the world. Let me go find a demonic 75 year old in a cult with a barren wife, right? True or false, that's not a first round draft pick, right? This would be like me at the NFL Combine. You're like, I'm not going with the first pick. I'll be honest, I tied my shoes this morning and I barely got it done. Like I'm not a first round draft pick. Abraham is not a first round draft pick. And what we tend to think is there's good guys and bad guys. The truth is the Bible's about bad guys and a good God. And it doesn't matter. You may look at yourself and you say, well, I don't bring anything. God says, that's okay, I can provide everything. The point is this, he doesn't bring into his relationship with God, anything that would make him a world changer, but God's gonna change him and God's gonna use him to change the world. And we tend to think of Abraham as a Jewish guy. He's not even going to be Jewish for 24 more years. He's saved as a pagan Babylonian, Gentile, just like most

of us. And then he is going to circumcise himself and his household 24 years later. Now, if you come back, that is a future sermon. Just I'm trying to emotionally prepare you for where we're going. How many of you be like, his whole household? I'm moving. But at this point, he's gonna live as a believing Gentile for 24 years. So he starts where we all start. Now, what I want you to see is that God here is talking about changing Abraham's life along with Sarah so that he can change their legacy. We like to say here at our church, we open our Bibles to learn, we open our lives to love, so that lives and legacies are transformed. We want you and your kids and your kids' kids to all know, love and serve the Lord Jesus. It's not to just about our lives, but it's about our legacy. So this is what we see in this next section. I wanna use the analogy, and I'll explain this in a moment of links in the chain of faith. Genesis 12:1-3, one of the most important chapters of the Bible is Genesis 12. It's the beginning of what we now know as the Abrahamic covenant, one way loving relationship between God to Abraham. Now the Lord said to Abram, God has not spoken here since the days of Noah, and he's gonna speak to Abram. And here's the good news, God speaks to his people. And if you need to hear from God, God could speak to you. Go from your country, move, leave, go. And your kindred, everybody you know, everybody you grew up with, all your extended family, your father's house, to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. That's a great promise. Our God is a God who likes to bless his people, and make your name great. Those are the two things that the Babylonians wanted. They wanted to have a great nation and a great name. God scattered them, confused their languages. He then picks one Babylonian to make him into a great nation with a great name. The point is anything without God is going to be a problem. But with God, it's going to be a blessing, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and to him who dishonors you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That's the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ. All this language of fathers and sons is to prepare us for God the father sending God the son, that's the point. So, the promise of the blessing is that Jesus is coming. And what God tells Abraham, he's like, I'm sending Jesus through your family, and through your family, Jesus Christ is gonna bless all the families on the earth. But here's the big idea, his wife is barren. Like, how am I gonna have a kid that creates a nation that brings forth the savior? Well, you're gonna need God. In the same way, Mary, Jesus's mother, she couldn't have a kid, but God did a miracle. God can do things to overcome whatever limitations you and I might have. This is why we love worshiping a supernatural God who can go above and beyond our circumstances to bless us in ways that otherwise would be completely impossible. So what we're seeing here is that up until this point, God is patiently waited, and he's allowed human beings to try and deal with the sin and the curse. So we looked in Genesis 3, our first parents sinned against God and it brought a curse. And so, people have been trying for a couple thousand years at this point to deal with the curse. So for Adam, his attempt was, I'll just be passive. I won't say or do anything. And I'll just let it play out and see what happens. And it goes very bad. Eve says well, if he's gonna be passive, I'm gonna be active. If he's not gonna say anything, I'll say something. If he's not gonna do anything, I'll do something. So then she tries to take matters into her own hands, gets deceived by Satan, and it goes very bad. Their son Cain decides, well, you know what? I'll just live lawless. I'll just do what I want. I'll just be independent. And he murders his brother, and then he lives a cursed life. Not good. So then God sends forth a period of time in Genesis 5, and he waits 1,656 years. And it's

almost like God's saying, well, if you think evolution is gonna fix it, I'll give you some time. And the point is things get worse, not better. People don't get better. They get better at doing evil. So then God sends forth the guy named Noah, Genesis 6 through 9. 1 Peter tells us, 2 Peter tells us in the New Testament that he spent 120 years preaching. So now it's evangelism, right? We've tried passivity. We've tried being active. We tried being lawless. We tried evolution. Let's try evangelism. So he preaches for 120 years. Hey, I'm building a boat, flood is coming. God's gonna judge you, please turn from your sin. How many people got saved? Zero, except for his family, his wife, his three sons, their three wives, all board the ark. Of all the human beings on the earth, the number of people who actually followed the Lord could fit in a suburban. Just think about that. So if we just wait for people to turn to the Lord, it doesn't happen. God gives 120 years. The big idea is this, tell everybody about Jesus, but make your family your priority, because they need to make their decision, but you need to lead your family. Well, then what happens is the Babylonians come together and they try globalism to overcome sin and the curse. And their thought is let's make a great nation. Let's make our name great. If we just pool all of our resources, our wisdom, our wealth, our might together, globalism, we could bring heaven on earth. We could overcome the curse. We could fix all of our own problems. We don't need God. What God says is that's actually gonna lead to the antichrist. If globalism gets its way and all the nations come together, and everyone works together and pulls together, Satan will nominate the antichrist to rule the world, and literally we're bringing hell to earth, not heaven. So at this point, the question is, well, how are we gonna deal with sin in the curse? We've been trying kind of everything we can think of. And God says my plan is covenant relationship. God changes everything with something called covenant. This is the beginning of the Abrahamic covenant. And it's one way love. God's answer is it's not about what you do. It's about what I do. It's not about how good you are. It's about how good I am. It's not about you being the solution. You're the problem. I'm gonna be the solution. And so God enters into covenant relationship with people, and he does that here with Abraham. And I want you to see it in this way. I like to use the analogy, and I've used this analogy for a lot of years. Think of it like links in the chain. So when you read the genealogies, think in terms of generational legacy. And what he just told us was Abraham's grandfather was an ungodly guy, and his dad was an ungodly guy, and he was an ungodly guy, and his brothers were ungodly guys. And it's been generations of this that they've been worshiping demonic, false, counterfeit gods. They've been living in Babylon. They've been living as Babylonians, not good, really bad. But then what God is doing here, he sort of breaks that chain. And then he says, Abraham and Sarah, you're the first link in a new chain. And then you're gonna have Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the people that you're gonna learn about in Genesis, they are links in a brand new chain of faith. When you read the genealogies, think in terms of your own family. What was my grandfather, grandmother like? What was my mother and father like? What am I like? What will our children be like? What will our grandchildren be like? Is it gonna be a blessed line, or is it gonna be a cursed line? Are we gonna break some habits and patterns and start afresh and anew? Or are we going to continue to do the same foolish, devastating things that our family has done for generations? And this is where generational curses and patterns come into being as well as generational blessings. And so ultimately, I'm gonna talk about this at Real Men on Wednesday night. And I'll elaborate on this, and you could join us live or online at about 6:30. But ultimately, I want you to think in these

terms, there's a first link in the chain, and what Abraham here and Sarah are in Genesis 12, they are the first link in the chain. They're the first people in their entire family history to meet the God of the Bible, his name is Jesus Christ. This is written about 2000 years before Jesus walks on the earth. And we've been waiting about 2000 years since his first coming, for his second coming. But this is a family that is waiting for the coming of Jesus. How many of you are first link in the chain? You're like, nobody in my family knows and loves the Lord. It's just me. I'll tell you what you're gonna deal with. You're gonna deal with a lot of bad habits. You're gonna deal with a lot of demonic opposition. You're gonna deal with a lot of family opposition as well. Your family's gonna be like, that's not how we do it. You need to stay true to your family, family first, blood's thicker than water. They're gonna come up with all kinds of slogans that aren't verses, that's what they're gonna do. And they're gonna try and pressure you to carry forth the legacy of cursing, not the legacy of blessing. In addition to the first link, there are strong links in the chain. These are people who do love the Lord, and they carry forth as generational legacy, faith and love for God. They're not perfect, but they do love and serve the Lord. There are weak links in the chain. Weak links in the chain are people who maybe grew up in a believing household, but their faith is very weak, not as strong as it should be. A story in the New Testament, as one example, is a guy named the prodigal son. His dad's strong link in the chain. He's very weak link in the chain. And he decides I'm gonna sin and rebel and just kind of go live my own life. Now, the good news is he almost breaks. When you have a weak link in the chain, enough pressure and tension, you can break that link, but instead God welds him back up and he returns home. And he works things out and he becomes a strong link in the chain. And then there are broken links in the chain. These are people who grew up with believing parents or grandparents, and they don't care about the Lord. Like that's their faith, not mine. They go to church, I don't. They read the Bible, I won't. They pray, I don't. I'm against what they're for. That's their thing. That's not my thing. The question is which are you, you're first link in the chain? Are you strong link in the chain? Are you weak link in the chain? Are you broken link in the chain that needs to get welded back up? Your family history, is it cursing or blessing? What's the family history? And so for me, I was thinking about it. So Grace's mom, my mother-in-law who I really love, she loves the Lord, and Grace's dad was the pastor. He's gone home to be with the Lord. He loved the Lord. So Grace's parents love the Lord. She loves the Lord. Grandkids love the Lord on our side. So now you've got three links in the chain. Same as true in my family. I was thinking about it. I think faith probably started in my family. I was thinking about it with my grandma. She loved the Lord and she was Catholic. She became a nun actually after my grandfather died, but she did have the holy spirit and she loved Jesus. And when I got saved, she flew out and she met with me. She was kind of the matriarch in the family. And I told her, I said, grandma, I met Jesus and I love him. And God's called me to be a pastor. So she flew out and she's like, why don't you wanna be a priest? I said, well, you know, soon. It's kind of a personal question, grandma, but there are reasons. So, I told her, I said, no, God spoke to me and said, marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men and plant churches. I can't be married and a priest. My grandmother stayed up all night, prayed, came out of the morning. She said God spoke to me, he said, you can be a pastor. You don't need to be a priest. You can be protestant. You don't need to be Catholic, 'cause Jesus is what really matters. Okay? So I was like, good. So, my grandma loved and served the Lord. My mom and dad today, they love Jesus. They're Christians. My dad gets up

every day, reads the Bible, prays for his 20 some' grandkids. I love the Lord and Grace loves the Lord and then our kids. I'm happy to report, we have five kids that are all strong links in the chain. So it's generations. And ultimately, we wanna see a lot of people in heaven with your last name. And we wanna see people that aren't even born yet, worshiping your God and following in your footsteps into the kingdom of God. So when you hear about Abraham and Sarah, the reason that they're so important, they're the first link in the chain from all of these people. Now that being said, as you are given faith from God, you live by faith in God. And what we're gonna see next is Abraham and Sarah starting to live by this faith that God gives them as a gift. And so here's what it looks like. Genesis 12:4-9. So Abraham went, right? He obeys God. As the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abraham was 75 when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai, his wife and Lot, his brother's son, all their possessions that they had gathered, all the people that they had acquired in Haran. It's probably hundreds of people and lots of possessions. This is a very wealthy, very affluent family. And they set out to go to the land of Canaan, they're heading toward the promised land. It's gonna be the land that God promises for them. And there's still a battle over that land 'cause God has a plan for it and Satan has another plan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem to the oak of Moreh, kind of a famous historic side. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Those are the bad guys. Those are the descendants of Noah through Ham and his cursed grandson, Canaan. Then the Lord appeared Abram. So he spoke a Abram. Now he's gonna appear to him. To your offspring, right? To your descendants, I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord. He's gonna worship who appeared to him. From there, he moved to the hill country east of Bethel, we'll spend a little more time learning about Bethel later when Jesus comes down to wrestle with the guy. That's the second most named city in the Bible, some 70 times, pitched his tent with Bethel on the east, on the west rather, and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord. First thing he does, he gathers everyone together, and he worships God, he has a church. And called on the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. And so what happens here is that ultimately, he is called. I want you to see calling, faith and worship. Those are the three things that I want you to note in this section. God calls him, God shows up, speaks to him, and it's Jesus Christ who says the same thing that he says in the New Testament, come follow me, right? This is what Jesus does with his New Testament disciples. Here, Abram is an Old Testament disciple, Jesus shows up and says, come follow me. Now, the question is, where are we going? He has no idea. He has no idea. Where are we going? I'll show you later, just pack. And this is a big move. This is hundreds of miles, right? In the ancient world. Abraham is a guy who was born in Babylon. All he knows is Babylon. His family's in Babylon. His friends are in Babylon. His history's in Babylon. He has inherited the family land. It's a big plot of land. They're very healthy. They've got hundreds of servants and slaves and members of the extended household. And as he is leaving, he's gonna leave the land. He's gonna leave a lot of people, and he's gonna leave the family business which has made them very wealthy, and guarantees for them a lot of prosperity for generations to come. And what God says is go, just leave all that, and go to a place that I'll show you later. How many of you, you're a planner, and if God says, okay, leave this. You're like, okay, well then tell me what I get in return. Right? You would think that God would negotiate this deal better. This is like showing up to a car dealership. They're like, it'll be \$57,000. Okay. Well, what car do

I get? Ah, we'll pick one. Don't worry about it. You're like, well, I am worried about it. I wanna know what I get for what I give. And ultimately, Abraham is giving up everything for the complete unknown. How many of you would not take God up on this deal? How many of you moved here to Arizona fairly recently? How many of you have moved here? Moving, it's a lot. Now imagine you're moving hundreds of people with a camel, to another country. They're not just leaving their city or state, another country. So all the moving trucks show up, hundred moving trucks show up to your family estate, and you load it all up. And the driver's like, okay, where were we going? You're like, I don't know, just start driving. And when the Lord says stop, we'll hit the brakes and unpack and live there. This is pretty incredible. And what it says is he obeyed the Lord. He did what God told him to do. Now here's the big idea, how much does Abraham know about God at this point? Very little. How much does he obey? Very much. Conversely, how much do we know? Very much. How much do we obey? Very little. The point is it's not how much you know, it's how much you obey that what you know.

- And at the end of the day, oftentimes we tell God, we're like, tell me the plan, tell me the plan. Tell me the plan, tell me the plan. And sometimes God is like, you know what? You wanna trust the plan, you need to trust me. And I'm not against plans. I like planning, right? I'm a profound strategist according to those personality tests. Like I have plans. I have backup plans. I have plans in case the backup plans fail, like I like plans. My wife, she's faith girl. She's like, I trust the Lord. I was like, I trust the plan. And so, what happens is sometimes we go to God and we're like, I just wanna know the plan. God's like, you don't need to know the plan, you need to trust me. I know the plan. You just need to fall me. That's faith. And that's what faith is here. And I want you to see this, Abraham is not running from his problems, he's running to his calling, there's a big difference. Oftentimes people are like, you know what? I don't like this marriage, I'm out. I don't like this city, I'm out. I don't like this job, I'm out. I don't like this house, I'm out. It's not going well, that's it, I'm out. I quit, I'm done. You cannot put together a blessed life if you're just running from your problems. You need to run to his calling. Okay? And so before you make, don't read Abraham and say like, they did a big pivot, I'm gonna do a big pivot. Well, it's 'cause God told them to, and they were being obedient. What is God telling you to do? So God calls and then he responds with faith, and faith is an internal conviction that leads to an external action. It's what you believe in here. It's how you behave out there. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul talks a lot about internal faith, believing in here. James talks a lot about external faith, behaving out there. Faith is what you feel, and it's what you do with what you know. So I'll give you an example. A couple is getting married, walking down the aisle. It's an act of... It's an act of faith. You're like, I know you trust me and the Lord 'cause you're here, right? And you walk down the aisle, and we know that they have faith in that person and in the God over that covenant, because we could see it. Like they acted on that conviction. The way that we know that Abraham trusted the Lord, it's not just what he believes, it's how he behaves. He packs up and moves. That's how you know he trusts the Lord. And sometimes faith manifests itself with works. Meaning it works itself out in the decisions of your life. Now, that being said, how many of you, you do trust the Lord, but you've not acted on it yet? It's not fully activated faith until you're active with your faith. And so it says this of him in Hebrews 11:8-10, by faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went

out not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in a land, a promise in a foreign land. So, God calls him, and he responds by faith. And he's going to a land that is new to him, he's never been. And he's going there so that Jesus Christ can eventually come and bless the nations and the families of the earth. And I want you to see here, the picture of Abraham is a little picture of Jesus. See, he is a son leaving his father just like Jesus Christ is the son of God who left God the father. And just as Abraham goes to a land that he has never been, Jesus Christ the son of God goes from heaven to earth. And he becomes the blessing to the nations and the families of the earth that was promised through Abraham. So, Abraham here is a little picture of the big picture, that the father would send his son to this unknown land, this planet that we inhabit. And so, there is God's calling. There is his faith. And then we see his first priority. As soon as he arrives, what does he do? He builds an altar. He worships God. The point is this, you can't just move or change your life. Nothing changes until everything is absolutely saturated in the worship of God. See, we are in the fastest growing city and county in America. The story of Abraham and Sarah makes sense to many of you. You're like, I know what it's like to say, you know what? God's calling us and we're gonna move. Changing your place doesn't change your life, unless you worship God, because nothing changes unless you worship God. So if you don't arrive in Phoenix, fastest growing city and county in America, great city and state. I love it here. It's a great place to be. It's been a total blessing to my family, and the literal name Phoenix means rising from the ashes. So it's a city of second chances. But if you show up and you don't set up an altar at your house and worship God, and then find a church, worship with the other families, you're not going to have God's blessing on you because you're not going to be meeting with God and hearing from God and obeying God. And a lot of people just think, well, I need to reset my life. Need to move, need to get new stuff. Need to get a new job, need to just really reset. But unless you worship, I'm telling you things may change, but your life will not change. So the first thing he does is he worships God, and there were altars already in that area, since the Canaanites were in the land. They worshiped demons. They practiced child sacrifice. These were some really dark, despicable, demonic people. And an altar would be made of anything that was in the earth, a stone or wood or earth, you would stack it, you'd create an altar. And there you would worship your God. So demons are being worshiped all over this land, and Abram shows up and he says, no, no. First things first, this belongs to our God, and we are inviting his presence. And it doesn't matter what other spirits are here. We need the holy spirit here. This is like you moving into a home. Homes not only have physical, but they also have spiritual residents sometimes. And so when you move into a house, you wanna make sure the people leave, but you wanna make sure that the demons leave too. And that's what he's doing here. He's moving into this new land. It's gonna be the home for his family. And he ultimately is saying, you know what? We need to get rid of the unholy spirits, and we need the holy spirit. Other gods are being worshiped. We need our God to be worshiped here. So ultimately this is about... So Genesis is this, it's about not just what happened, but about what always happens. And let me say for all of us, there will be at some point in our life that kind of Abraham and Sarah moment, where God is saying, what you were doing is ending, and something new is beginning. And that time in the middle is faith. There was a Christian mystic. He wrote a poem some years ago called the "Dark Night of the Soul". And it's that time between I was doing this and God will show me that, but in the middle, it's just dark. It's like God shows

up at nighttime and says, hey, we're gonna go on a brand new journey. Like, okay, Lord, I'll see you in the morning when the sun comes up. He's like, no, we're starting tonight while it's dark. No, no, I'd rather wait till the sun comes up, God, so I could see where I'm going. Nope. That's not faith. We live by faith, not by sight. So we're gonna start this journey in the darkness. You can't see where you're going. You're just gonna need to trust that I see where we're going. If you're not in that place, you've been in that place or you will be in that place. It's that place where it's like, okay, I'm not sure where we're going, God, I'm not sure what we're doing. I wish I knew what the plan was. Let me say right now, the world feels this way. How many of us you're like, where are we going? What are we doing? When is it over? Help. We're all sort of feeling that, right? It feels dark, feels a little uncertain, a little scary. The question is God, could you lead me into that dark future? Yes he can. And so let me close with this. I wanna share kind of a lengthy story. The themes here are covenant and building an altar in your life. Covenant is God's relational language. This is where on the human level, marriage is a covenant. So just like I have a covenant with my wife, Grace, God has a covenant with me. Just like Abraham has a covenant with Sarah, God has a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. So it's about covenant relationship, and it's about building an altar to worship. So, this is an interesting weekend. Let me tell you a story. And it came outta staff Bible study this week. We do staff Bible study on Wednesday, and the junior interns are in there and they're usually super fun. And one of the younger kids asked a question and they're like, well, what does it mean to build an altar? I told them a story I'll share with you. So, this is an important weekend in my life. It was 34 years ago this weekend, that I went on my first date with Grace. So, I'll show you what this looked like. I always say that men and women age differently, that women age like wine and men age like milk. That's what I always say. And so that's me and Grace and a fern. I don't know why the fern is there. It was the eighties, so just... So, Grace and I had our first date 34 years ago this weekend. I could have never imagined the crazy wild adventure that God would have us on, that we would move to college and then we'd move to Arizona. I mean, it has been an epic adventure of faith. And I wasn't thinking on that first date about the future. I wasn't thinking, yes, we'll have five children. We'll move to Arizona. I was thinking... We went to Red Robin, I was 17, and all I was thinking was, yes, I would like more fries. That's all I was thinking, to be honest with you. Who doesn't want more fries? And the campfire sauce. So that's all I was thinking. And I didn't know that I would end up in covenant with that woman. And because of that woman, I would end up in covenant with God. So, we started being friends and hanging out, and she bought me a Bible. And I got saved reading that Bible in college at the age of 19. So now, I'm in covenant with God, right? I have faith in Jesus Christ. And then I really wanted to marry Grace. And so we started working toward having not just a covenant with God, but a covenant with each other. And so we found a good church. It was our version of an altar where we would go to worship God and learn about God and figure out how to do life and marriage. It finally reached the point where it was the night before our wedding. We were 21 years of age. And I was so excited to spend my life with Grace. And we were going back to college where we had an apartment. And so I didn't have a place to stay 'cause our stuff was all packed up. We're literally getting ready to move a couple hundred miles like Abraham and Sarah. And so, Grace's uncle John, it was her great uncle. She didn't have a grandpa. So he was basically the grandpa on her life. He invited me to his house. Let me grab something to tell you a story. He invited me to go

stay at his apartment with him. And he had this hard rock maple furniture that he had custom built, and it included this chair. And so, her great uncle sat in a chair, and I sat in this chair. This was the chair I sat in. And it was the night before I married Grace. And uncle John, he had married a gal named Gladys. They couldn't have any children. They were barren like Abraham and Sarah. And his wife got Alzheimer's and no longer could remember him after, I don't know, maybe 50 years of marriage. She couldn't remember him. Now, she would wander and put herself in harm's way. So he put her in a care facility because he wanted to make sure she was okay. And then he rented a place that was as close as he could get just a few blocks away. And it was across the street from the Marriott Hotel where I worked for a little bit, and he didn't like to cook. So he'd walk over every morning, he'd get breakfast, and then he'd get fresh fruit, and he would bring it to her. At least twice a day, every single day, he would go visit his wife that he was in covenant with in her care facility. And he would show up, he'd visit with her. And at some point, she would look at him and ask, who are you? I mean, like 50 years, and he'd pull out the photo, and he'd be like, well, I'm your husband, John. And we've been married for a very long time. And here's our photos and here's our wedding photo. And I brought you fruit. She's like, oh, okay. And then 10, 15, 20 minutes later, she'd look at him. She's like, who are you? Uncle John visited her at least twice a day, every day, because he was faithful to her and he loved her even though she didn't remember him, that's a covenant. So it was the night before I married Grace. And he sat in his chair and I sat in this chair, and he had some questions for me, he loved Grace. And he said, so why do you wanna marry Grace? I said, I love her with my whole heart. I wanna do life with this girl. This is the girl I can't live without. I just adore her. And he said, promise me you'll love her. I said, I promise I'll love her. He said, promise me you'll be faithful to her. I said, I promise you I'll be faithful to her. He said, promise me you'll love and be faithful to her even if she doesn't know who you are or remember you. And I looked at him, I was like, I promise you, I will love and be faithful to her even if she doesn't know or remember me, it's a covenant. So then he went to bed and I sat in this chair and I prayed. For me, this chair was like a bit of an altar. It's where I met with the Lord. And I prayed for our marriage. And I prayed for our children. And I prayed for our children's children, and I prayed for generations and legacy. Grace and I got married, went back to college. We graduated, came back. Every day, John was still visiting Gladys. And then one day we went to his house to check on him 'cause he wasn't answering his phone and we found that he had died, and we found him. And so we were broke college students, newly married. So we inherited his hard rock maple furniture, and we got this chair. This chair was in our living room, and I've taught hundreds of Bible studies sitting in this chair. We did premarital counseling for hundreds of couples sitting in this chair. I've held all five of our children in this chair. I used to sit like this, and I would put the kid right there, the little one. And I would read Bible commentaries and systematic theology over them as I was preparing sermons. So all of my children have sat right here. For me, this is a bit of an altar, and it reminds me of covenant. Abraham and Sarah had covenant with God and each other, and they built an altar for their family. There's nothing special about this chair. It's not magical. There's nothing superstitious about it. It's just a chair. But it's the place over the years that I have met with the Lord. And we had our Abraham and Sarah moment about seven years ago, almost seven years ago. We had been working in a place for our entire life. It was home to us. It's where all our family and friends were and everyone and everything we knew, and things

got increasingly more difficult, but we felt like we wanted to stay there 'cause we had family and friends and we loved it there and it was home. And it was a very difficult season. And I met with the governing board and the pastors that were over us. They were good men and they're still friends and they're still good men. And I said, you could look at everything and just decide if you want me to stay or go. And they came back and they said, no, we want you to stay. We're sorry for what your family's going through. And we love you, and you've made some mistakes as well. And it's like, okay. So I told Grace and the kids, we're gonna stay. We're not going anywhere. And then we had that Abraham and Sarah moment, where God spoke and said, no, you're going. I was like, well, where are we going? He's like, I'm not gonna tell you. So I was in the bedroom. Grace was in the kitchen. God sometimes speaks to me, dreams, visions, words. Grace doesn't get as much of that. And she came running into the bedroom, and I actually think I might have been sitting in this chair when God spoke to me. I can't remember. It's kind of blurry. And Grace came running in and she was just white, and I thought something happened to one of the kids. And I said, honey, what's going on? She said, God just spoke to me. I said, God just spoke to me. God spoke to us at the same time in different ends of the home. And I asked her, I said, well, what did God tell you? She said, well, God said we're released and we need to resign immediately. And she said, what did God tell you? I said, God said a trap is set. I now know what that is. I didn't at the time. You're released, you need to resign immediately. I said, God said the same thing to both of us. She said, what does that mean? I said it's over, like everything we have done is over. And she's like, well, what do we do next? I was like, I have no idea. Grace was so burdened 'cause she has a mother's heart for people. She fell to the ground. It was just weeping bitterly. And I felt a burden lift and I felt delivered. I started worshiping. So then we called the kids in. Well, first thing we called wise council and our pastors and the authority over us. We want to confirm, this is a big decision. Move our whole family halfway across country for an unknown future. And all the authority over us and the pastors that we love and trusted, they all said that's a word of God, you need to obey it. So we called a family meeting, told the kids we're leaving. The kids are like, where are we going? I said, I don't know. Like, where are we gonna go to school? I don't know. Well, are we gonna be around grandma and grandpa and the cousin? I don't know. Well, dad, what are you gonna do for a job? I don't know. Well, dad, how are we gonna pay the bills and live? I don't know. What I know is God said go, and that's all that he said. So we went. And we ended up in Arizona, and we're blessed.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- And we're blessed. I wish in the middle, I could tell you I had a lot of faith. I got up every morning, quoted all the faith versus, tapped the red S on my chest while my cape was flying in the wind. No, I was freaked out. I spent a lot of days sitting in this chair, anxious, fearful, nervous eye twitch, hand tremor, like ooh. And I'd sit in this chair and I made this my altar. Like okay, I'm just gonna sit here, and I'm gonna talk to God about this. And we're blessed. Last night, Grace and I for our 34th... Last night was actually our 34th anniversary of our first date. So we were went to Red Robin. We did. I had a nice reservation. She's like, let's go to Red Robin. I was like, it got us off to a good start. I'll sign up for another 34 years and more fries. So we went to Red Robin, and we just sat there talking about all of God's blessing in our life. We

spent hours talking about it last night, went for a walk. The greatest blessings in our life have come in the last seven years.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- And you guys are here, and we love you so much. And if you're in that season, I just want you to know that God is good, and that he does bless. And if you keep going, you might be overwhelmed by the blessing that awaits you. That's been our story. And our kids are all strong links in the chain and they married believers. And I love my life. I'm the happiest I've ever been. I'm overwhelmed at God's goodness. And we want you to just find God's will for your life. And so, that's gonna start with building an altar to worship God. That needs to be in your car. That needs to be at your work, that needs to be at your home. And I'm gonna pray for you in a moment. But this chair usually sits up in my office. And what I do before every sermon is I kneel and I pray for you, and I pray for me. And I pray that God would anoint the teaching of his word. And so this is still the place that I meet with the Lord. And so I'll pray for you. And then we're gonna spend some time worshipping. Father God, I thank you for the story of Abraham and Sarah. And God, I thank you that even if we come from a bad family, you can give us a fresh start and make us a new family. God, I thank you that even if we're far away from you, that you can come and find us, that even if we're worshipping demons, you can give us the holy spirit and make all things new. God, I thank you that we have a covenant with you. And I pray that we'd have a covenant with our spouse. And God, I thank you that wherever we are, we can set up an altar. We can just say, you know what? I'm gonna meet with the Lord here. I'm gonna talk to the Lord. I'm gonna listen to the Lord, 'cause I want to hear and obey the Lord. God, I just want to thank you for all of your faithfulness to me and to our family and our extended family. I wanna thank you, God, that you were faithful through our Abraham and Sarah, "Dark Night of the Soul" season. I thank you that we are blessed and these people are part of that tremendous blessing. And God, I pray for their lives and their legacies. I pray for their marriages and families. I pray for all the little kids in the backyard. And I pray for all the little ones in the womb that are getting ready to enter into this world. And God, I pray against the enemy's servants, their works and effects. And I pray that Trinity Church would be an altar, be a place that families come to meet with you. And that they'd also have an altar at their home. For us Lord, that was our dining room table, where we talked and prayed, and we still do. And so Lord, just thank you that you're a good God. And God in those times that we're unsure what you're doing or where you're taking us, I just pray that we would return to the story and have faith to continue into the darkness until we see the sunrise and the blessings emerge in Jesus's good name. Amen.