

*First Things – Genesis*

**Genesis 12:1-9**

**“When God Calls”**

**1. ABRAM PERCEIVED THE GRACE OF HIS CALLING**

A. What Abram had to weigh

B. What Abram had to want

**2. ABRAM PURSUED THE GOAL OF HIS CALLING**

A. He listened to the word of God

B. He lived by the will of God

**3. ABRAM PRAISED THE GOD OF HIS CALLING**

A. In appreciation for the grace of God

B. In acknowledgement of the glory of God

1. On February 20<sup>th</sup>, the 53<sup>rd</sup> running of the Daytona 500 was won by a virtually unknown driver named Trevor Bayne. At just barely 20 years old, Bayne was the youngest driver to ever win the historic race.

2. After winning the race, Bayne said that he received a call on his personal cell phone that appeared on his caller ID as “Private Number”.

3. Since Bayne didn’t know who it was, he ignored it. Almost immediately, the phone rang again from the same “Private Number.”

4. This time, Bayne took the call. It was the White House calling to let Bayne know that the president would be calling him in a few days to personally congratulate him on his win.

5. Apparently, a radio station in Bayne’s hometown of Knoxville heard about the phone call from the White House, and decided to play a prank on Bayne. Early one morning, the station called Bayne’s number.

6. Bayne answered in a sleepy voice, and the D.J. said, “Hello, Trevor, this is President Obama.” What was Bayne’s response to who he thought was the president? Bayne said, “Oh, hey. What’s going on?”<sup>i</sup>

7. In Genesis 12, we find the story of another very important call. This one came not on a cell phone or from the White House.

8. The call came, not to a champion of any kind, but to a common man named Abram. The call was from the one, true God, who according to Acts 7:2 appeared to Abram as the “God of glory.”

9. This man Abram, who would later be called Abraham, is described in the New Testament as the father of all who believe God by faith.

10. With that in mind, the call of God upon Abram's life in Genesis 12 is a picture for us today of the call of Christ to those who believe Him by faith.

11. As we look at this important Bible passage, I want us to consider what the father of the faithful can teach us about hearing and heeding the call of Jesus upon our lives. Notice first of all, that:

### **I. ABRAM PERCEIVED THE GRACE OF HIS CALLING**

1. Genesis chapter 11 gives some background on this man Abram. It tells us that he had lived in a place called Ur. It was a city in Chaldea, and by all accounts it was a place where the people worshipped the sun, moon, stars, and many other false idols.

3. Joshua 24:2 indicates that Abram's father worshipped other gods, and so we have every reason to believe that Abram did as well.

4. But everything changed for Abram when he heard a word from the true and living God. None of the stars had ever talked back to Abram. No man-made idol had ever called his name.

5. Yet, verse one of chapter 12 says, *"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."*

6. I believe Abram recognized that it was purely the grace of God that had chosen him and appeared to him with this important call upon his life.

7. In much the same way, when the Lord Jesus comes to us and calls us to Himself, it is a work of grace, and like Abram, we must recognize the blessing of Christ's call upon our lives.

8. Consider how Abram perceived the goodness of what God was trying to do with Him. Consider with me:

#### **A. What Abram had to weigh**

1. According to verse one, the first words of God to Abram were this: *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house..."*

2. That is not exactly the most exciting thing to hear from God. "Abram, I want you to leave your home and your kinfolk behind, and get out of town to a place I will show you when we get there. Pack up your stuff and go."

3. Before Abram could obey this call upon his life, he had to first weigh out the cost of what God was asking of him. Was he willing to leave everything for the God who had appeared to Him?
4. When you turn over to the New Testament, we find Jesus calling his disciples with an equally weighty call. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus said, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."*
5. In Luke 14:26, Jesus said, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."*
6. Just a little later, in Luke 17:33, Jesus says that those who try to save their own life will ultimately lose it, and the only way to save it is to give it up for Him.
7. The truth is; just as Abram found, we too must realize that following Jesus comes with a cost. In fact, Jesus urged us to count that cost, and weigh out what we are willing to give up for Him.
8. I want you to see in this text that having done that, Abram *still* chose to follow God. He *was* willing to leave his home and family behind in order to follow the call of God. Why is that?
9. Consider not only what Abram had to weigh, but consider also further:

#### **B. What Abram had to want**

1. Look again at verse one. God called to Abram saying, *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."*
2. Once he weighed it all out, for Abram to leave Ur, he first of all had to want to be wherever God wanted him to be more than where he was.
3. Likewise, when Jesus calls us to follow Him, we must want to be with Him more than we want to be wherever we are without Him.
4. Notice verse 2. God gave Abram some incentive to leave behind his home and family. God said to him, *"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:"*
5. In verse three God promises that Abram's blessing would bless all the families of the earth. In other words, God invited Abram to be a part of something bigger than himself and greater than the life he was currently living.

6. In order for Abram to get up and go with God, he had to want in his heart this greater life that God was offering to Him, more than he wanted the life he was currently living in Ur.

7. In much the same way, when we follow Christ, we must see that what He is calling us to is something greater and bigger than where we currently are in this life.

8. Yes, to follow Him, we must leave behind the things of this life and this world. Yet, it really is not a sacrifice when you understand the blessings of the life He is offering in exchange for those passing things.

9. In his wonderful book, *Radical*, Pastor David Platt says, "This is the picture of Jesus in the gospel. He is something – someone – worth losing everything for."

10. He goes on and asks this penetrating question. "Do you and I really believe that Jesus is so good, so satisfying, so rewarding that we will leave all we have and all we own and all we are in order to find our fullness in him?"<sup>ii</sup>

11. Abram teaches us that when Jesus calls us to give our lives to Him, we *should* see it as a gracious offer to something bigger, better, and far more glorious than we could ever be or have apart from Him.

12. That is what Abram saw and wanted in the call of God for His life. *Abram perceived the grace of his calling*. With that being said, notice a second truth we draw from this passage. Notice that:

## **II. ABRAM PURSUED THE GOAL OF HIS CALLING**

1. Having weighed the cost, and having realized the grace and blessing of what God was calling Him to do, verse 4 says, "*So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him...*"

2. Abram obeyed the call that God had placed upon him, and he set out to pursue that which God had promised Him.

3. The old writer, A.W. Pink says that in Abram "we have exhibited the life of faith".<sup>iii</sup> That is, Abram gives us an example of those who walk and live by faith.

4. He points us to what it means to pursue the call of God while living in this world. For us as followers of Christ by faith, this example is an important one.

5. Notice how Abram pursued the goal of his calling. Firstly:

### **A. Abram listened to the word of God**

1. When Abram packed up and left in pursuit of God, the only thing he had to go on was what God had told him. In that word he had instruction and incentive, but it was only what God had said, nothing more.
2. One writer says, "Abram was asked to believe and obey the bare word of God." It is what John Calvin called by the Latin phrase, *verbum nudum*, the naked word of the Lord.<sup>iv</sup>
3. In other words, God didn't show Abram a brochure with pictures of the land to which he was going. Nor did God give Abram any kind of advance on the blessings He promised him.
4. All He gave Abram was His word, and Abram pursued God's call with a faith in nothing more than that word from God.
5. In much the same way, Christ has given us His Word that those who follow Him by faith *now* will one day taste and see all the blessings He has promised.
6. To follow Jesus is to take Him at His Word. Jesus said in John 14:1, "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*"
7. Faith doesn't require God to answer every question, fill in every blank, and map out every turn. It simply believes what God *does* tell us, and moves forward based purely on His Word.
8. I read years ago that the African Impala can jump up to 10 feet high, and cover a distance of up to 30 feet, yet they can be kept in an enclosure with a wall only 3 feet high. The reason is that the Impala will not jump if it cannot see where it is going to land.
9. The Word of God does not always tell us where we are going to land, but if God tells us to jump the landing is there whether we can see it or not.
10. In pursuit of God's call on his life, Abram listened to the Word of God. Notice further that:

### **B. Abram lived by the will of God**

1. Look again at what God said to Abram in verse one. He told him to leave his homeland, and to go to, "*...a land that I will shew thee.*"
2. In other words, Abram didn't know what land he was going to, but he knew he had to go. That being said, notice how the text describes Abram's route.

3. Verse 4 says that Abram left a place called Haran. Verse 5 says, "...they went forth to go into the land of Canaan..." Verse 6 says, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh..."

4. What I want you to see is that Abram is traveling through many different places, but he does not stop and settle down in any of them.

5. Why? It is because Abram was waiting for God to show him where he was supposed to be. He lived according to the will of God for His life.

6. As followers of Jesus, we are to walk through this world obeying the word of God and waiting for His leadership in our lives.

7. Too often, people will make their own plans and follow their own path, and then once they get where they want to be, then they will turn to God and ask Him to bless what they have already done.

8. Living by the will of God means that I let Him chart the course. Where I stop and where I go are according to His guidance and His will.

9. Have you ever even asked the Lord, "Where do you want me to go? What do you want me to do?" Does the will of God even factor in to the path and direction of your life?

10. The story is told of a brief prayer offered up by former Yankee second-baseman, Bobby Richardson, at a national meeting of the FCA. Richardson prayed, "Dear God, your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

11. Abram left in obedience to the Word of God, and lived in submission to the will of God. We must pursue Christ's call upon us in the same way.

12. Notice a third truth we see in this passage. Notice not only that *Abram perceived the grace of his calling*, and *Abram pursued the goal of his calling*, but notice also further that:

### **III. ABRAM PRAISED THE GOD OF HIS CALLING**

1. In Genesis chapter 11, the people of Babel sought to build a city and a great tower in order to make a name for themselves.

2. Abram built no city, no tower; not even a home for himself. He lived in a tent all the days that he followed God.

3. Yet, chapter 12 does tell us of one thing Abram built. Twice, in verse 7 and verse 8, we find this statement, "...there he builded an altar unto the LORD..."

4. The altar was a place of worship. It was where God's people offered sacrifices to Him, and called upon His name.

5. Throughout his journey, Abram was a man who worshipped and praised the God who had called Him years ago when he was just a pagan living in Ur.

6. As we live out our Christian life in this world, we ought to do so with the sacrifice of praise always fresh on our lips. We ought to praise the Savior who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light!

7. Consider the praise of Abraham in this text. He built an altar to the Lord first of all:

#### **A. In appreciation for the grace of God**

1. Look at verse 6. It says that when Abram came to the place called Sichem (or Shechem) in the land of Canaan, "...the Canaanite was then in the land."

2. Even though the land was already inhabited, verse 7 says, "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him."

3. While traveling through Canaan, God appeared to Abram and promised that He was going to give that land to his future family.

4. God had previously told Abram that he was *headed* to a land. Now, God tells him that He is going to give Him the land. This was just another token of the grace of God to this man.

5. How did Abram respond? He built an altar to the God who had so graciously appeared to Him.

6. 2,000 years ago, the God of heaven appeared to us in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ. John said, "...we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14)

7. Not only did he come to call us to Himself and save us from our sins by His death on the cross, but He also promised us a land in the future that He will give to us by His grace.

8. For that reason, like Abram, we ought to pause and offer to Jesus praise and thanksgiving for the grace He has shown to us.

9. Years ago, a group of Presbyterians met for a conference. Since they were Presbyterians they were not used to shouting and saying things like, "Amen," or "Praise the Lord."

10. To help them express their thanks to God, every attendee of the conference was given a helium filled balloon. Whenever they felt like praising the Lord, they were supposed to let their balloon go, and rise up toward heaven. When the conference was over, 1/3 of the balloons had never been released.<sup>v</sup>

11. One of the lessons Abram teaches us is this: let your balloon go. Give God praise and thanks for what He has done for you while you walk through this world!

12. Abram built an altar of praise to the God of His calling, not only in appreciation for the grace of God, but also:

### **B. In acknowledgement of the glory of God**

1. Look now at verse 8. It says, *"And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD."*

2. Abraham set up his tent near a city called Bethel. There we are told that Abram built another altar unto the Lord, and that there he called upon the name of the Lord.

4. This altar was not prompted by a meeting with God, as the first one had been at Shechem. So, why did Abram build this altar?

5. I love what R. Kent Hughes suggests. He says, "Bethel...was home to an important Canaanite sanctuary to the god El, head of [the Canaanite] pantheon."

6. In other words, living near Abram in Bethel were people worshipping and serving a false god. Hughes continues by saying, "Abram ignored this and built an altar to [Jehovah]."<sup>vi</sup>

7. In the midst of a pagan world, Abram built an altar to the true God and called on His name as a way of declaring to those around Him the glory of His God.

8. As the followers of Christ in this day, we too ought to give praise and glory to His name in this lost and blinded world so that others may see that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

9. Following the example of Abram, our prayer ought to be that of the Psalmist in Psalm 142. He says, "...Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

1. Though God is speaking to Abram in this chapter, one of the promises to him is a promise for us as well. Look again at the close of verse 3. The Lord said, "...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

2. How do all the families of the earth, including us, find a blessing in Abram? The answer is through the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, who descended from the seed of Abraham.

3. In Acts 13:23, Paul says, "Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus."

4. We are grateful for the example that Abraham provides for us. He teaches us what it means to follow the call of God, and to live for Him while on this earth.

5. He points us to what a life of faith looks like as we pursue God's high calling upon our lives.

5. Most of all, though, we are thankful for the Savior who descended from Abram. In John 8:56, Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."

6. We have seen His day too, and like Abram we rejoice in it and are glad.

---

<sup>i</sup> Gluck, Jack, "Trevor Bayne Still Basking in Daytona 500 Aftermath", 2/25/11, *sbnation.com*, accessed 3/10/11, <http://www.sbnation.com/nascar/2011/2/25/2015003/trevor-bayne-2011-daytona-500-nascar-wood-brothers>

<sup>ii</sup> Platt, David, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream, (Multnomah Books *ebooks*, 2010), *Amazon Kindle edition*

<sup>iii</sup> Pink, A.W., Gleanings in Genesis, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1950), p. 140

<sup>iv</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning & Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 182

<sup>v</sup> "Praise", *sermonillustrations.com*, accessed 3/10/11, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/praise.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 187