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The Calling of Abraham, Part 1

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Genesis 12:1-7 (ESV)

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Hebrews 11:8-12

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 the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

I have found it quite interesting over the years to pay attention to people when it comes time to study the Bible or when the Bible gets talked about in a group setting. People get a little bit insecure or nervous. Most people, or at least many people, feel very insecure or inept around the scriptures. They're afraid of appearing foolish.

What we're doing is giving some basics of the overview of the Bible, and then it's practical teaching for us so that we can approach it without being nervous. People can have a greater

sense of competence in it. The Bible is really a story written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors, and it tells one grand story of God's work in our world—what He has revealed to us and what He wants us to know about this life that He created for us. It tells us about this world that He put us in, about our meaning and purpose in it, and about His work in it.

As we grasp this story—this narrative that He has told us is true about our world—we start to find how our small stories fit into the grand story of God. As we get caught up in this story, our lives develop much more meaning and purpose. For many people, this leads to much more passion and enthusiasm about their lives. So, we do this: we look into the scriptures because something supernatural can happen to us when we open the pages of the Bible.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and said this: "Whatever was written in the past, in the former days, was written for our instruction." The inspiration of the Spirit—now, we're in one of the books of Moses, Genesis—through Moses was written for our instruction so that, as we study it and see the encouragement there and the endurance of God's people, we might have hope. Hope is this supernatural swelling in us, an optimism that cannot be thwarted. This is a living hope, as Peter wrote about—born inside of us and kept in heaven. It will never perish, spoil, or fade. The circumstances of this world can't quench it.

Keep in mind, the Bible is a book about human history, accurate in its account, but it's also a book about the unseen realm: the work of God, an unseen God invading and working in His creation. He created time, space, and matter that we live in, and He Himself gets involved in it. Agnostics believe that God created the world and then stood back from it. Atheists don't believe there even is a creator. Of course, the scripture says that's just plain foolishness when you look at the order of creation. Christians believe God created the world, and He's involved in it because He loves it, cares for it, and wants to display Himself through it—especially through people, whom He made in His image.

As we study the scriptures, something supernatural can happen to us. The Spirit of God works with the Word of God to bring you and me faith—a confidence in the unseen. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things we cannot see. The writer of Hebrews says this: "By faith, we understand the universe was formed at God's command." Now, you and I could look into the scientific evidence that points to the validity of the story of scripture and creation—the story of the great flood and the judgment of God in the time of Noah—but we don't take the time to do that here. What we're doing is asking God to do for us what He said He would do as we study the scriptures, and that is to bring supernatural faith to us: a confidence in Him, a belief in His story, which leads us to this hope—this unquenchable optimism, this fuel for the human spirit—that God wants you to live with. It's an unquenchable excitement about what lies ahead, because no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind can conceive what God has prepared for those who love Him.

So, if we develop a faith, and then our hope comes along—this unquenchable optimism—it sets you and me free to live out the greatest virtue for which we were created, and that is the virtue of love: to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then to love each other—to love our neighbor as ourselves. As we do this, friends, we're living out the very call of God in our lives for which we will be accountable. We find ourselves developing more and more fullness, meaning, and purpose in our lives as the selfish part of us starts to fade away, and the new nature in us—the work of the Spirit—starts to come alive.

In this love, we're not talking about the permissive idea of love that exists in modern day America—this idea that we should all just completely accept each other and affirm everything we're doing. This is the agape love of God, the unconditional love that calls us closer to God but, at the same time, has a very purifying power in it. It burns up everything in us that is not of Him, that is not holy, that is not righteous. This is the process of sanctification on this side of eternity, where how far it goes depends on how far we're willing to let God purify our souls and work in us.

And so God wants to do this work in us through His scriptures. Paul wrote to those in Corinth, saying, "For this reason, we don't lose heart. Though we can see the discouragements outwardly, things are wasting away." It's temporary. What is seen is temporary—all of that is wasting away. But inwardly, you and I can be renewed day by day. We can start to see that our light and momentary troubles, which we're experiencing here in this broken and fallen world, are achieving for us—if we are faithful to God in them—an eternal glory that far outweighs the challenges of all the trials here.

Paul says, "We fix our eyes not on what is seen." We don't need faith to see what is visible: the world around us, time, space, and matter. But we fix our eyes on what is unseen, for what is unseen is eternal, and what is seen is temporary. God wants you and me caught up in the forever game, friends—the eternal game for our souls and the souls of others.

Now, we turn to our text. We've come through the first 11 chapters of Genesis. We've seen the creation of the world and all that is in it. We've seen the creation of humankind, made in God's image, separated into two genders: male and female. We've seen them tempted by the serpent, the introduction of the evil one, the fallen angels, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We've seen Adam and Eve give way to temptation, turn against God, and disobey Him.

We then saw the corruption of humanity, where their hearts became disobedient to God, sinful, and selfish. This created conflict and blame within relationships and brought about the appearance of clothing to cover our nakedness and shame. Evil entered the world, and soon after, the first two children, Cain and Abel, ended up in conflict. Cain killed Abel, and murder entered the world.

We then see the world expand, with fruitfulness coming through Adam and Eve: sons and daughters, and more people populating the earth. But by Genesis 6, God observes that man's heart was inclined toward evil all the time. He was saddened that He had made the world. Yet, in His grace, He called forth Noah, commissioning him to build an ark to save himself, his family, and his three sons and their wives. God sustained the human race through Noah and his family, while He wiped out every living thing on the ground and in the air, except for those on the boat with Noah. The evidence of a worldwide flood is all around us, friends.

After the judgment of the earth, God commissioned the people to expand and populate the earth through Noah's children, and they did. However, they all gathered in one place and began to build the Tower of Babel. So God confused their language and separated them into different nations or tribes. This is how we got the world we live in today—many languages, different cultures, and people spread across the globe. God diffused human power so that in an evil world, no one group could consolidate power and become a tyrant over all. By disseminating people, God prevented the rise of a singular oppressive force.

Now, God intervenes again. He comes to a man named Abram. In Genesis 12:1, it says, "Now the Lord said to Abram..." This week, we will look at two aspects of God's nature revealed through the story of Abram, and two more next week.

First, notice that the Lord came personally to a man here on earth, and He knew his name. Friends, I want you to understand this about God: Though He is all-powerful and all-authoritative, though He has judged the earth and will judge us again, He is also loving, kind, and personal. He cares about you, and He even knows your name.

We have just come through the first 12 chapters of the inspirational book that God has given us. We've seen three genealogies: the genealogy of names from Adam to Noah, the genealogy from Seth, Noah's son, all the way to Abram, and the genealogies of the spreading of Noah's sons in the table of nations. God keeps track of people on the earth. He knows everyone who is born, and He knows their names. He knows your name, friend. If you think about a name and how important it is—how distinctive and unique it is—it serves as an identifier of a unique person in human history.

In fact, many people today have three names: an identifying first name, a distinctive middle name, and a last name that records the genealogy we're part of. This helps identify the family and region from which an individual comes. Names matter, and God knows our names. This clearly shows us that God is a personal God, and He wants to be involved in our lives. He called forth Adam and Eve and kept a record of names through these genealogies down through history up to this time. He called forth Noah and his family, and He names Noah's sons.

Now, we see the calling of a man named Abram, and eventually, God will change his name. This shows us that God is personal. In Genesis 12:1, it says, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" You need to understand that Abram's father, Terah, lived in the Far East, in what was then known as Ur of the Chaldeans. This was near the Babylonian Empire, where the Tower of Babel was built—a strong, cultish region with New Age religions, various spiritualities, and demonic strongholds.

God called them westward. Abram's father, Terah, led them to Haran, north of modern-day Israel. But then, God further called Abram out—from his country, from his kindred, and from his father's house to a new land. This shows us that, though God is loving and personal, He is also a God to be obeyed. In His authority, He can call us to uproot our lives and change them at a moment's notice. Through Abram, Noah, and Adam, God shows us that our allegiance to Him must be our top priority. He is worthy of full allegiance and full obedience.

Notice the specifics of the call: "Go from your country." Our allegiance to God is greater than our allegiance to our country. He called Abram out of his country. "Go from your kindred." Our allegiance to God is superior to our allegiance to our community and friends. Many of us like to belong and be part of things, to fight for what's right in our communities and countries. But sometimes God calls us away from all of that, to grow in Him and depend on Him. He has the right to do this. "Go from your father's house." Even greater than our allegiance to our biological family is the call of God into our eternal family and purpose with Him.

Do you know that God has a plan for your life, friends? Ephesians 2:10 says, "You and I are God's workmanship, created in Christ to do the good works He has prepared in advance for us." He has told us in many ways that our highest allegiance should be to Him. We should seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and He will take care of the rest.

We've learned two important things about God: He is very personal—He cares deeply about the world—and He calls people to Himself so that He can demonstrate His grace and love through them. He continues to redeem and call the world back to Him, a world that has fallen away from Him, so that we might find life—eternal life—in Him. And through the lineage of Abraham, God is starting a family here, a spiritual family, not just a biological one. This family will lead to Jesus, the Savior of the world, through whom anyone who puts their faith will be saved.

We see that God knows our names. He loves each one of us and calls us to Himself as the greatest allegiance of our lives. Those who have ears, let them hear.

Father, thank You. Thank You for Your word, which so clearly teaches us about You—how powerful, mighty, strong, and holy You are, but also how personal, caring, loving, patient, and kind You are. Father, give us ears to hear. Help us hear what You're saying to us as

individuals. Help us respond to Your call in our lives, just as You called to Abraham. Come to us, call our names, and give us the desire to walk faithfully with You so that at the end of our days, we too may hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.