**Turn the Page – From Blessed to Blessing**

**Week 2**

**(Video overview of Genesis 12-50 prior to the message)**

**Introduction: Turn the Page Series**

The Bible can be an intimidating book, can’t it? Regardless of where we are on this spiritual journey engaging with and navigating through scripture can be both difficult and challenging.

Cut these down

* We don’t even know where to begin
* We may not understand what a lot of it means
* We don’t feel like we have the time to set aside to read
* We may not see it as relevant to our life today
* We may feel convicted after reading

This book can be scary for many of us.

Switch this with the following paragraph. So that is why we began, last week, an 11-week journey through the Bible. And in addition to what we are doing here together on Sunday mornings, there is a Monday – Friday **“Turn the Page” Bible experience** that we encourage everyone to participate in! And the great news is, that it’s not too late to jump in…you can go to our app to sign up for either an email version or a podcast version of the experience. You can also visit our **website** to catch up on the days that you have missed.

Our hope is that through this series every one of us will gain an educated overview of the Bible. But the goal of engaging in Scripture is never cerebral. We engage the Bible to come to know God, his ways, and to allow him, through the work of his Holy Spirit, to use the precious pages of this book to transform our lives. In other words, this is not just or primarily about us gaining more knowledge getting smarter, but it’s about us coming to better know who God is and what he wants for our lives.

So I want to invite everyone to continue to open our hearts to how God wants to use this series in our lives.

**Recap:**

**(Series Image)** Last week, we left off on a page of the story talking about how God, the creator of the universe, made the world and everything in it. And this story told us about how above all else, he is a loving God who made people to be the object of his love and goodness. And his desire was to live in an intimate relationship with his creation. And in the beginning, everything was complete or whole. This is something that is referred to, in the original Hebrew, as “Shalom”.

Now, God alone knows what **is good** for human beings and God alone knows what is **not good** for us. And to truly enjoy the “good” things that God has for us, we have to trust in him and obey what he says.

Yet, near the very beginning of the story ~~right away~~, humans mistrusted God and decided what they wanted. And they fractured that relationship with God and in turn, the destruction of “shalom”.

But then we “Turn the Page” to Genesis 12, and what we find here is God initiating a new beginning.

**A New Beginning: Gen 12:1-2**

Lets jump right into verse 1, **“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’” (Genesis 12:1,2 NIV)**

So God decides to bring about a new beginning through a man named Abram. God calls Abram to “go”. Let’s stop and think about the severity of this request… God told him to leave his home, his extended family and everything that was familiar to him. Essentially, God asked Abram to risk everything he held most dear in his life.

But God goes on to tell Abram what will happen when he goes. God says that he is going to “bless” Abram. OK, that sounds great, but it’s a little vague, so what does that actually mean? Here is a glimpse as to what I thought it meant:

Can Arts do this?

* Is this the blessing that God was talking about? **(Abram eating a steak dinner - #blessed)**
* How about this one? **(Abram sitting on a beach - #blessed)**
* This sounds like a great blessing! **(Abram in a nice car - #blessed)**

Actually, in the Old Testament, the word “blessing” didn't have anything to do with the material wealth that we associate it with today. Our definition of the word “blessing” has been greatly twisted. Cut it at this point and go to the story. Let the “reveal” that blessed is about relationship come later. Being blessed isn’t about resources; it’s about a relationship. And here Abram is given the opportunity to live in relationship with God. And that is the blessing!

God declares that he is going to make Abram into “a great nation.” Meaning that Abram and his descendants would become the people of God.

* They would be the ones to live out God’s original intention for humanity as they live in intimate relationship with him.
* They would be the ones who would experience God’s goodness as they lived in obedience to him
* They would be the ones through whom God blessed the world as they closely followed him.

Can you see the picture of this amazing new beginning coming together? Everything sounds so great! But there is a significant roadblock ahead though…Abram doesn't have any kids! Should we talk about his age…how big an obstacle this really is… How do you get “a great nation” out of a couple that has no children?

**A Covenant:**

Now we turn the page to Genesis chapter 15, and we find Abram, still with no children. And understandably, here we see Abram beginning to doubt God’s promise that he will make him into a great nation…that his family will be the “people of God”. I mean, how can you get something out of nothing?

It was at that point that **“(God) took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars – if needed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” (Genesis 15:5)**

Imagine for a moment, a neighbor of yours walking outside, talking to himself or herself while staring up at the sky. You’d think that something was terribly wrong with them, right? “Hey, there’s Mitchell outside again staring into the sky. Should we call the police?”☺

But it was in this moment that God reassured Abram that his offspring will be more numerous than the stars in the sky AND that they will possess the land that they are standing on and will make it their own. I’m not sure when the last time was that you got to look up at the stars, but I can tell you, there are a LOT of stars up there!

And then God takes it a step farther and seals this promise with a covenant. Now, a covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. And this specific covenant is critically important to the story of the Old Testament. Listen to what the story says,

**“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—‘”** **(Genesis 15:18)**

Covenants were really serious things. Breaking the bind of a covenant was thought to be so serious that one was actually inviting a curse on themselves. This is serious stuff!

Scripture I think it is really important to note that the whole covenant agreement goes down while Abram was asleep. This is hugely significant! It means that God assumes sole responsibility for the covenant and the consequences of breaking it. It’s all up to God! He initiates this special relationship and then promises to BLESS Abram because of it.

**A People**

Figure out Abram/Abraham usage. Could trim this. Important point: the ones who are blessed are Abraham’s descendants.

So what does all of this mean? The nation of Israel are now God’s peeps☺ Those who were Abraham’s descendants moving forward are included in this special covenant, which is all about a relationship. From here on out in the OT, God’s people are referred to as the “nation of Israel”, and that meant Abraham’s descendants. You might wonder why the OT includes all these long genealogies with names you could never pronounce that sound more like a Mediterranean cuisine than someone’s name. This is a big reason why. If you were related to Uncle Abe, you were a part of God’s family.

I don’t know if you’ve ever had a famous relative, but this is what it would feel like if you were living in OT times. I wonder if they got cool benefits from being related to Abraham. Maybe they went to the front of the line at the sheep shearing station or 25% of their next purchase of camel hair. I’m not sure, but I do know that this special relationship with God was a big deal!

Now you might be thinking, “well this is interesting. I gained some knowledge today and maybe I’ll go back and look at those genealogies in Genesis with the 17 syllable names and know they matter.” But as we said, the goal of understanding Scripture is not just cerebral. We’re not here to just fill our heads with a lot of knowledge and that’s it. This is a story about a new beginning and a covenant and a people. And this story is not just a story, but our story.

“What do you mean it’s our story?” My name isn’t included among Abraham’s descendants.” Well actually it is. When Jesus came, he ushered in a new covenant **(LUKE 22:20 ON SCREEN).** This new covenant meant that God’s special relationship with his people was now made through the person of Jesus. We have the Old Testament and New Testament. That word “testament” means “covenant.” So there’s the Old Covenant with Abraham and now the “New Covenant” with Jesus. That special relationship that God establishes through Abraham will now be established through Jesus. Does that mean the old covenant was thrown out or didn’t matter? No, it just means the old covenant was now fulfilled in Jesus. He was now the vehicle for this special relationship with God. He is the mark of the new covenant.

This is was a huge thing! It was a bit shocking even, especially to those people who were descendants of Abraham. In essence, Jesus was now saying that you could no longer just rely on your ancestry to be known as the people of God. The Apostle Paul echoes this in writing to Christ-followers in Galatia, who were dealing with challenges from teachers who insisted they had to follow the old covenant:

 **So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26-29 NIV**

This is why it’s OUR story! Those who are in Christ are Abraham’s descendants; the people of God! This story has a beginning, middle, and end and its our story because we’re now the people of God. When we read Scripture, its not read as a list of do’s and don’ts of ancient history, but rather an unfolding story that involves us.

**“Scripture—the Old and New Testaments—is the story of creation and new creation. Within that, it is the story of covenant and new covenant. When we read scripture as Christians, we read it precisely as people of the new covenant and of the new creation. We do not read it, in other words, as a ﬂat, uniform list of regulations or doctrines. We read it as the narrative in which we ourselves are now called to take part. We read it to discover 'the story so far' and also 'how it's supposed to end.'” – N.T. Wright**

Could trim this down… Turn to your neighbor… So when we read about God blessing Abraham and his descendants, we are now part of that! We are now the ones that are blessed. It’s not something left to the history books, but a real life narrative unfolding that details our special relationship with God. That’s what it means to be blessed. Turn to your neighbor right now and say, “You’re blessed!”

Maybe you hear that, or even say that to the person next to you just now, but if you’re honest with yourself, you don’t really feel blessed. Maybe you came in here this morning and you would say the last thing you feel about your life is that you’re blessed. You might be going through a valley and questioning the promises of God, or you’ve experienced disappointment or division in a relationship, or your life is far from where you thought it would be. How can I be blessed, you might ask.

What I want you to see is that the blessed life is not the easy life. It’s not the #BLESSED life that we see on social media. “Blessed” doesn’t mean that we always get everything we want. Abraham didn’t get everything he wanted. It means living in Abraham didn’t. When God made this covenant with him that we looked at earlier, it didn’t include a guarantee that Abraham would see this in his lifetime. Abraham died before the fulfillment of the covenant.

~~Abraham was like the longtime Cubs fan that died before the 2016 World Series; he held onto the promise his whole life but didn’t live to see it fulfilled.~~

We are the BLESSED ones, and sometimes that means enduring challenges and holding onto the reason for being BLESSED – a relationship with Him.

**Blessed to be a Blessing (Genesis 12:2-3)**

But we’re not BLESSED to just have it end there. We’re blessed to be a blessing. Look at what God says to Abraham:

**“I will make you into a great nation,
    and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
    and you will be a blessing. Genesis 12:2-3 NIV**

Abraham didn’t just receive the blessing. He was blessed to be a blessing. He was also a transmitter of the blessing.

~~I’m going to give my age away a little bit here, but how many of you had a boom box?~~

~~If you’re under 30 you’re like, “what’s that?” Anyway, it’s a device to listen to music☺ I got my first boom box at Christmas in 1990. Now I didn’t carry it around on my shoulder but I did love that thing.~~ But the truth is, if that radio, or any radio didn’t have a transmitter I wouldn’t hear a thing. That’s what a transmitter does; it turns an electric current into sound waves I can hear. Like a radio transmits sound waves to the ear of the listener, we are to transmit the blessing to the people we know. We help people find their way back to God.

How do we BLESS the world? Here at COMMUNITY, we have what we call the BLESS Practices, and here’s an explanation:

**VIDEO of B.L.E.S.S. Practices**

**Challenge**

Where is God calling you to “GO?” Tie this back into Abram story…God called him to GO! Out of his comfort zone. Who is God calling you to BLESS? I believe God puts people in our lives that He’s calling us to BLESS. Sometimes we just have to be OPEN to being a blessing, and aware of how we can bless others. Maybe it’s a

* Neighbor that’s a single parent needing help with yardwork
* Co-worker who’s dealing with an illness in their family
* Friend who is struggling with loneliness

A few months ago we gave Walmart gift cards away in our services to teachers as a way to BLESS them, but it was what happened with a few of the extra gift cards that I think had the most impact. I had learned earlier in the day that one of our attenders who is a single parent had an unexpected plumbing issue that morning and had to spend $300 on an emergency repair. Talking to her after services, I just felt like God was prompting me to give her the remaining gift cards, which amounted to $100. Later that afternoon, she sent me a text saying, *“Money has been so tight for us and having to spend that other money this morning was my grocery money for this week! God is sure working through you and I just don’t want it to go unnoticed! He sure takes care of us and shows up in unexpected ways. What a pleasant surprise today!”*

I think God gives us moments like this to BLESS people, and we just have to respond to them. It may not always be by blessing someone financially, but sometimes it’s time or energy given to help them with something to make their burden a little lighter.

We all have people that God is calling us to BLESS individually. But we also have people that God is calling us to BLESS collectively. We do this most often in small groups. We challenge every small group to be a blessing to those around them. To do this, we encourage every group to identify a mission – the “where” or “who” God is calling them to BLESS. This goes back to our belief that God has blessed us to be a blessing, straight out of the experience of Abraham in Genesis!

**Commissioning Moment**

Each year we take part in a Small Group Commissioning moment during our services, which serves as a powerful reminder and challenge that every one of us is sent by God to be a blessing to those around us. Right now I want to invite all of our small group leaders (and members if space allows) up onstage with me for this commissioning.

The word “commission” literally means “to entrust mission.” That’s what we’re doing in this moment. God is entrusting the mission to you. These groups have been thinking and praying about where or who God is calling them to BLESS, and we want to pray over them as a way of sending them out on mission.

PRAY HERE

You may be sitting out there this morning and not yet part of a small group with a clear mission, but you still want to be used by God in the places he has put you and with the people he has put around you.

Here’s the truth for all of us: We cannot be a blessing by staying where we are. The church is a sent people. We’re sent to be a blessing. Not just a few of us. All of us are sent. We’re all blessed to be a blessing. Tie not into comfort but doubt that God will do something through you. God took Abraham out of his tent, where he was comfortable, and directed him to look up **(Gen. 15:5 ON SCREEN)** and see the stars; a visual reminder of how this new covenant would last for a multitude of generations. So many people would be blessed through Him, and the same is true of us.

**“…Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky… “ Philippians 2:15 NIV**

Let’s go and be a blessing to the neighbors, friends, and co-workers that God has placed around us. Let’s go and be a blessing to the lost, last, least, and lonely. Let’s live for something greater than ourselves. Let’s shine like stars.

**Communion Moment**

Because of Jesus, you and I have been brought into God’s family. We are now the heirs of the promise given to Abraham. What do we receive as an heir?

**He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5b-7 NIV**

Through Jesus we have life with God; forever with Him. Not a contract or list of rules, but a relationship that will last for eternity.