**Turn the Page Week 2 – Blessed to Blessing**

**Message Big Idea**: “Turn the Page” by seeing all that you’ve been given as a blessing meant to bless the world.

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-5, 15:1-21

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**Video: The Patriarchs (Overview of Genesis 12-50)**

**Introduction: Turn the Page Series**

*(Series graphic)* The Bible can be an intimidating book. Regardless of where a person is on his or her spiritual journey, engaging the Scriptures can be challenging.

* Sometimes we don’t even know where to begin.
* Or we may struggle to understand what we’re reading.
* Or perhaps we find it difficult to connect the words of this book to our everyday lives.

This book can be difficult for many of us. And that is why last week we began an 11-week journey through the Bible. Our hope is that through this “Turn the Page” series that every one of us will be able to grasp the overarching story of the Bible. Once we lay that foundation, we can gain the confidence to engage Scripture more on our own.

But don’t misunderstand… the goal of engaging in Scripture is never just cerebral. We engage the Bible to come to know God and 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 journey through the Bible is not just about gaining more knowledge; it’s about encountering God.

In addition to what we are doing here together on Sunday mornings, there is a Monday through Friday *(graphic)* **“Turn the Page” Bible Experience** that we’re encouraging everyone to participate in. And the great news is, it’s not too late to jump in! You can go to our website or the COMMUNITY app to sign up for either an email version or a podcast version of the experience. If you missed the first week of the experience, you find all the previous days on our website.

So today, let’s continue to open our hearts to how God wants to use this series in our lives as we turn the page.

**Story Recap**

Last week, we left off on a page of the story where God, the Creator, made the world and everything in it. We learned that God is a loving God who made people to be the object of his affection. His dream was to live in an intimate relationship with his creation. And in the beginning, everything he made was complete or whole. This is something that is referred to, in the original Hebrew, as **“Shalom.”**

Now, as Creator, God alone knows what **is good** for human beings, and God alone knows what is **not good** for us. To truly enjoy the “good” things God has for us, we have to trust him and obey what he commands.

Yet, near the very beginning of the story, human beings mistrust God and rebel against him. They fracture their relationship with God, and as a result, *(circle with line crossing out “Shalom”)* “Shalom” is destroyed.

But then as we “Turn the Page” to Genesis 12, we find God initiating a new beginning.

**A New Beginning: Genesis 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**

God decides to bring about a new beginning through a man named Abram. He calls Abram to *(highlight)* **“Go.”** Let’s stop and think about the severity of this request. God told Abram to leave his home, his extended family, and everything that was familiar to him. Essentially, God asks Abram to risk almost everything he held most dear in his life.

But this command of God also contains a promise. God says that he is going to *(highlight – “I will bless you”)* “bless” Abram. OK, that sounds great, but it’s a little vague. What does that actually mean?

* Is this the blessing that God was talking about?(Abram eating a steak dinner) That steak looks really good, Abram! #BLESSED!
* How about this one?(Abram sitting on a beach)Living the life, Abram! I could use a beach vacation right about now.
* This looks like a great blessing!(Abram in a nice car) I’m ready for God to bless me with that!

*(Genesis 12:1-2)* 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.

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.
* They would be the ones who would experience God’s goodness as they lived in obedience to him.

It’s an amazing new beginning! There’s just one problem. Abram doesn’t have any kids. Oh, and did I mention he and his wife are in their mid-seventies? Not exactly the prime childbearing years! How do you get “a great nation” out of a couple that has no children?

**A Covenant**

*(Genesis 15:2-3)* Abram is wondering the same thing. As we turn the page to Genesis chapter 15, he is full of doubt about God’s promise.

* How could he become “a great nation?”
* How could he be the father of a family who would be the “people of God?”
* How do you get something out of nothing?

Amidst all Abram’s doubts:

**“[God] took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed 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 while staring up at the sky. You’d think that something was terribly wrong with him, right? *“Hey, there’s Mitchell outside again staring into the sky. Should we call the police?”*

But in this moment God reassures Abram that his offspring will be more numerous than the stars in the sky and that they will be his people. 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 further 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 Bible. Here is the covenant in verse 18:

**“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**

God is declaring, “Your descendants will be my people, and I will give them this land.” Covenants were serious commitments. Breaking the bond of a covenant was thought to be so serious that one was actually inviting a curse on one’s self.

But there’s something really important to note about this covenant. *(Genesis 15:12)* If we back up a few verses, we discover that while this covenant is made, Abram is asleep. It’s one of the most important moments in all of the Old Testament, and Abram is snoring away! What is the significance of this? What does it mean? It means that God assumes sole responsibility for the covenant and the consequences of breaking it. God is the one making the promise. All Abram has to do is believe him. It’s all up to God!

**A People**

So why is this story so significant in the story of the Bible? Because this marks the beginning of God’s plan to restore his dream for the world. Remember, his dream was to live in an intimate relationship with his creation. Now, through Abram, God will have a people to call his own.

As part of this covenant, *(Genesis 17:5)* God changes Abram’s name to “Abraham” which means “father of many.” And he does bless Abraham with a son, Isaac, who is the first child of the promise.

From here on out in the Old Testament, God’s people are referred to as “the nation of Israel,” and that means Abraham’s descendants. You might wonder why the Old Testament includes all these long genealogies with names that sound more like 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, his chosen people.

Now you might be thinking, “Well that is all interesting. I gained some knowledge about the Bible today.” But as we said, the goal of understanding Scripture is never just cerebral. We’re not here to just fill our heads with a lot of knowledge. This is a story about a new beginning and a covenant and a people. And this story is not just Abraham’s story; it’s our story. *“What do you mean it’s my story?”* you might ask. *“My name isn’t listed among Abraham’s descendants.”* Well, actually it is.

If we turn lots of pages forward to the New Testament, *(Luke 22:20)* we’ll find that when Jesus came, he ushered in a new covenant. Through this new covenant, Jesus declared that the special relationship that God established through Abraham would 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 is now the vehicle for people to have a special relationship with God!

That’s why the Apostle Paul declares:

**“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**

All who decide to put their faith in Jesus are now Abraham’s descendants, included in the people of God, given the blessings of the covenant!

And that’s why we don’t just read the Bible to gain knowledge; we read it because it is our story! Theologian N.T. Wright reminds us:

**“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**

The Bible is our story! It’s not something left to the history books, but a real life narrative unfolding that details our special relationship with God.

We are now the ones that are blessed! Turn to your neighbor right now and say, “You’re blessed!”

However, maybe you hear that, 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. Maybe you’ve experienced disappointment or division in a relationship. Your life might be 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 a life lived on Easy Street. It’s not the #BLESSED life that we see on social media. “Blessed” doesn’t mean that we always get everything we want.

No, the blessed life isn’t about resources; it’s about a relationship. It’s about the opportunity to live in a special relationship with God…to be his people, and him our God. It’s about living with God the way he originally designed us to live all the way back in the beginning of the story. It’s about getting to join in the restoration of **“Shalom.”**

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

And, it’s important for us to recognize that we are blessed not to just be blessed, but to be a blessing to the world. If we go back to Genesis 12, 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.**

**I will bless those who bless you,**

 **and whoever curses you I will curse;**

**and all peoples on earth**

 **will be blessed through you.”**

**-Genesis 12:2-3**

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

It’s kind of like how a transmitter in a radio works. A transmitter turns an electric current into sound waves I can hear. The truth is if a radio didn’t have a transmitter I wouldn’t hear a thing. The electric current would still be out there, but there would be nothing to direct that current to my ear. Like a radio transmits sound waves to the ear of the listener, we are to transmit the blessing of God to other people. We are to help people find their way back to God so that they, too, can be blessed.

So how do we BLESS the world? Here at COMMUNITY, we have what we call the BLESS Practices. Here’s a quick overview:

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

**Challenge**

*(“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go…’” –Genesis 12:1)* When God called Abraham, he called him to GO! Out of his comfort zone. Out of the familiar. Where is God calling you to GO? Who is God calling you to BLESS? Maybe it’s a…

* Neighbor that’s a single parent needing a little extra help. Or a…
* Co-worker who’s dealing with an illness in their family. Or a…
* 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 provided through that gift today 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 to help make someone else’s burden a little lighter.

We all have people God is calling us to BLESS individually, but we also have people God is calling us to BLESS collectively. Here at COMMUNITY, we challenge every one of our Small Groups to ask the question, “Where is God telling us to GO? Who is God calling us to BLESS? We challenge our groups 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**

Today is a special day here at COMMUNITY. Once a year we set aside time for a Small Group Commissioning moment during our services. Commissioning serves as a powerful reminder that every one of us is sent by God to be a blessing to the world.

Right now I want to invite all of our small group leaders (and members if space allows) up onstage with me for this commissioning.

*(Wait for people to come on stage.)*

Each one of these group has been thinking and praying about the “who” or the “where” God is calling them to bless, and today we want to commission them for that mission.

*(Turn to speak to people on stage)* The word “commission” literally means “to entrust mission.” That’s what we’re doing in this moment. God is entrusting the mission to you. So we want to pray over you as a way of sending you out on mission.

*(Turn to audience)* Would you join me as I pray a prayer of commissioning?

*PRAY HERE*

*(Allow people to exit the stage)*

**Conclusion**

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.

Still, maybe you doubt you could really have any real impact in this world. Let me remind you… *(Genesis 15:5)* God called Abraham out of his tent, 75-year-old, childless Abraham, and directed him to look up at the sky. “Look at those stars,” God said to Abraham. Your life will impact that many people!

And here we are today. Following in Abraham’s footsteps as “the people of God.” If we turn the pages quite a ways forward, the Apostle Paul says of Christ-followers:

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

We are the stars God promised to Abraham. So let’s go and be a blessing to our neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Let’s go and be a blessing to the lost, least, and lonely. Let’s live for something greater than ourselves. Let’s shine like stars.

**Communion Idea**

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.