

September 15, 2019

Called  
God Calls Abraham  
Genesis 12:1-4

**Opening words:** This is the definition of Called:(according to CRU, formally Campus Crusade for Christ) Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service. That definition reminds me of my calling. Personally, I have never questioned my calling. It is my greatest resource. I am both humbled and proud that God called me, with my unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My calling is a big part of my personal identity. Daily, I am reminded I am paid by this congregation and serve a United Methodist congregation, but I work for God. Let me say this clearly. You don't want a minister who hasn't been called.

We are instructed today from the very first book of the Bible, Genesis. Depending on the context, the word Genesis can mean "birth," "genealogy," or "history of origin." The title describes the content of the book. Tradition tells us Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. The general outline of Genesis is important. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are considered prehistorical. They answer the basic questions of our world. How was the world created? How was sin introduced into the world? Why are there so many languages? Those are some of the most loved and known stories in the Bible. Chapters twelve thru fifty contain Patriarchal History. Those chapters contain the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the fathers of the Hebrew faith. Our scripture reading for today are the opening words of the Patriarchal section. Genesis 12:1-4. Let me call this message *God Calls Abraham*.

**Genesis 12:1-4** The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

<sup>2</sup>"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.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Helen Keller (1880-1968) was an American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was also the first blind-deaf person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 1904, she

received that degree from Radcliffe College. Keller once said, "*True happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.*" I agree. If you agree say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the beginning of Patriarchal History. It is not our first introduction to Abram, later Abraham. He was mentioned in the previous chapter. According to that chapter, Abraham's father was named Terah. The entire family lived in Haran, until Terah's death at the age of 205. Some things don't change. The death of a loved one is always hard, and many make major changes during a time of loss. That is what happened to Abraham.

The twelfth chapter begins with Abraham making major changes in his life. However, Abraham does not initiate the changes. It is God, who initiates the changes. At seventy-five years old, the Almighty instructs Abraham to move to a new land. The name of the land is not identified, but it will be a land that will be remembered for the generations to come. And, in time, it will be filled with Abraham's descendants, too many to count. Never forget it. Abraham means "the father of the multitude." How special are Abraham's descendants? They are so special they will be a blessing to the entire world. For within this race of people, Jesus will be born. Never forget it. Abraham is our spiritual ancestor too. I love this story because Abraham started the greatest challenge of his life at seventy-five years old. This is also true. I am jealous of Abraham because he heard God clearly and discovered his purpose? If you wish God spoke that clearly to you say, "**Amen!**" That leads us to an interesting question.

Have you discovered God's purpose for your life? Several years ago, Rick Warren wrote a book called *The Purpose Driven Life.* Many churches and Christians read that book. The reason is simple. Many wanted to discover their purpose. About the same time, Warren wrote another book called *The Purpose Driven Church.* We read that book here. Don't misunderstand me. I am not knocking the books. They helped many. However, you don't need to read the books to discover your purpose. All you need to do is read Abraham's calling. If you want to discover your purpose, then you must do what Abraham did. If you want to remain clueless about your purpose, then don't read it. So what did Abraham do? Abraham did three things.

**First, Abraham trusted God.** Look at the text with me. Prior to our reading, we are told Abram had a good life. It was a stable calm life with his father. Abraham was rooted in that community and there was no sign that Abraham was interested leaving it. He had prospered in that land. He had every reason to stay. It was God who initiated the move. This is the key line. There is no sign Abraham questioned God because he trusted God and was open to God's leading. How far does Abraham trust God? Beyond our reading, we are told the first thing Abraham did in that new land was build an altar to God. It was the first of several altars Abraham would build to God. Abraham built an altar anywhere he had a spiritual mountaintop experience. Moving to a new land made no logical sense, but Abraham did it because Abraham trusted God. This is the

question. How far do you trust God? If that question makes you think say, "**Amen!**" If you want to find your purpose, then you must trust God.

**Second, Abraham trusted others.** Look at the text with me again. Verse four tells us Abram didn't travel alone. The scripture tells us he took with him his nephew Lot and his wife Sarai. He took with him his possessions and the people he had acquired in Haran. Some of those people may have been employees and some of those people may have been slaves. This is the point. When Abraham accepted God's call and moved, it did just affect his life. It affected many lives, including the people who stayed behind. If Abraham was going to maximize his purpose, then he had to trust the people in his life. How far do you trust the people in your life?

One of the great concerns in this church is not knowing everyone. For some reason that is important to many. This is not Cheers where everyone knows your name. This is the church of Jesus Christ. This is the truth. This is not a single cell church. It is impossible to know everyone, especially with three worship services. The only thing that unites this church is the mission, making disciples for Jesus Christ, and the budget, our common enemy. However, knowing everyone isn't really that important to me. I am more concerned about everyone trusting one another. This is a fair question. How far do you trust your fellow church members? Let me ask you two more questions. Have you ever overworked yourself at church because you want it done right? Experience tells me it will get done, just not by you. You just don't trust someone else to do your job. Have you ever criticized someone for doing something differently than you would have done it? The issue is what they are doing. The issue is trusting. Trust is a big issue within the life of the church. We will never maximize our efforts as a church until we trust one another. Consider this with me.

One of the great scenes in the Bible is the Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-28. You remember the scene. Earlier in the chapter, we are told Jesus had been resurrected. The pain of Calvary is in the rear-view mirror. The Master's earthly ministry is complete. The only thing waiting for Jesus is the perfection of heaven. Jesus's work is done, and he is passing the mantel to the disciples. Jesus tells them to go and make disciples in all nations. I hope you don't miss the next line. Jesus is turning the work over to eleven men, Judas Iscariot is gone, and Mathias has not yet been chosen, who have been a disappointment to this point. They are pre-Pentecost disciples. They have been unable to understand the simplest concepts, and they failed to do the simplest task. Regardless, Jesus trusted the immature disciples with the ministry. If Jesus could trust the disciples, then you should be able to trust a fellow church member. If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" If you want to find your purpose, then you must trust God. If you want to find your purpose, then you must trust others.

I only have one regret in the ministry. I have found my purpose for life. I am glad I stayed here for twenty-five years and I am glad this place because my home. My regret revolves around a three-year period before I went into the ministry. When I graduated

from college, I had a secular job. I met many fine people at that time, but the work seemed superficial. It wasn't that I didn't hear God's calling. It was I tried to ignore God's calling. I was terrified of public speaking and I knew my eyes were problematic. I failed to see my strengths, because I was so insecure. I failed to answer my calling, my purpose for living, because I didn't trust myself. How far do you trust yourself?

**Third, Abraham trusted himself.** Look at the scripture with me one last time. God calls Abraham to move to a new land to start a new race. Abraham goes because he trusts God and Abraham goes because he trusts the people in his life. Abraham goes because Abraham believes in himself. There is no sign in the scripture Abraham doubted himself. Abraham believed in Abraham. According to NBC News, 85% of people have a low esteem. Do you believe in yourself? If that question makes you think say, "**Amen!**" If you want to find your purpose, then you must trust God. If you want to find your purpose, then you must trust others. If you want to find your purpose, then trust yourself.

George Sanders (1906-1972) was a true Hollywood star. In 1951, he won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor in the movie *All About Eve*. He seemed to have it all, both fame and fortune. He should have been a happy man, but happiness was not part of his life. History tells us George Sanders checked into a hotel near Barcelona, Spain. He checked in but he never checked out. On April 23, 1972, he took his life. He had a heart attack caused by an overdose of barbiturates. When his lifeless body was found, and a suicide note was also found. This is what the note said:

**Dear world, I am leaving because I am bored. I have lived long enough. I am leaving you and your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck!**

How can a man with so much have so little? According to the world, Sanders had everything you needed to be happy. He had everything he needed to be happy, but he lacked a purpose. There is more to life than collecting things. There is more to life than purchasing things. There is more to life than going to a party. God doesn't call us to be consumers. God calls us to make a difference in this world. So let ask you the question of the day again.

What is your purpose? Your purpose in life is not necessarily your vocation, the way you pay your bills. Your purpose is your passion. Your purpose is the intersection where your personal interests meet human need. What is that one thing you enjoy doing that benefits someone else? I am convinced there are as many purposes as there are individuals. Your purpose could be helping the young advance in school. It could be helping the aged fill out their income taxes. It could be volunteering at some non-profit which helps some social ill. It could be keeping an eye on your lonely neighbor or traveling the world to help a stranger. I am convinced there are as many purposes as there are people. Abraham's purpose was to be the father of new nation. What is your purpose? Do you remember the quote from Helen Keller? She once said, "*True*

*happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.*”And, all of God’s people said, “**Amen!**”