

“Follow Me and Multiply” // Gen 12:1–3 // *Multiply: The Journey of Abraham #1*

GEN 12... I became pastor of this church 14 years ago, which seems like a long time ago...

It was one of the **craziest situations**. My wife and I originally were convinced that God had called us to plant a church in Ft. Lauderdale (*Our logic was, “God and lost people live everywhere, so why not live at the beach?”*). But God made so remarkably clear that the Triangle is where we were supposed to be.

Since that time we’ve grown passionately committed to the Triangle. We feel like it is one of the best and most strategic cities in the world. **That’s not just our opinion, btw. Raleigh-Durham** is the 4th fastest growing city in America and is projected by the United Nations census study to be the fastest growing large city over the next 15 years. (Point of clarification: Actually, tied with Charlotte, but Charlotte will always be inferior to us because we are the state capital. *You hear that Spence Shelton, Mercy Church? You better recognize.*)

It’s been a **crazy journey for all of us** the last 14 years.

- **Fourteen years ago 300 of us covenanted together** to do whatever God had called us to do and to prioritize the reaching of lost people.
- **Shortly after that, God brought college students** to our church and changed our personality forever... I’ve told you this story before: 1 week 5 showed up and the next week 500, because college students travel in herds. I think they all came in 3 cars. In the space of about 3 weeks our attendance tripled and our weekly giving went up \$13.48.

Today, **somewhere around 9K** of us gather each weekend.

So I want to spend a few weeks talking about where we are going as a community...

- **God has blessed us, Summit Church** and we are going to ask the question of **why he has blessed us**, and **what he intends** for us to do with that blessing.

And I’m going to present that same question to you, personally.

Where has God blessed you, and what does he intend for you to do with that blessing?

We are going to look through the life of **Abraham**, one of the **most important figures** in human history.

- It’s hard to **overestimate Abraham’s significance** in human history.
- *Think about this: THREE major faiths*, which together account for more than half of world’s population, **look to Abraham as the father of their faith**. (*So, even if you’re not a believer, understanding Abraham is essential to understanding human civilization.*)
- **Personally, I love the story of Abraham** because *life did not just happen to him; he happened to life. He didn’t just “go with the flow,” he stood against his family and society and redefined the future. I like people like that.*
- **Abraham was a man who multiplied his life**, and he gives us a picture of how God wants to use each of us in the world.

But **when his story starts, he’s got nothing**. There is a **little tragic irony** in how the writer sets the story up.

- **Abram’s name means**, literally, “father,” but he’s 75 when his story opens and he doesn’t have any kids.
 - Later on his **name changes to ‘Abraham,’** which means ‘the father of many.’ (In other words, ‘Abram’ means ‘daddy;’ ‘Abraham’ means ‘big daddy.’) But he’s childless.

- **His life is like a cruel joke.** He seems to have this destiny written into him, but he's nearing the end of his life and he's got nothing. It's **almost like life is mocking** him.

I want to convince many of you that you are in the same spot as Abram.

- God has **destined your life** to have eternal significance.
- But **many of you look around** and you don't see it happening yet.

Abraham is going to have to walk a path toward significance and multiplication, and it is the same path you are going to have to walk, too, **whether you are young, middle-aged, or old.**

Some of you really yearn for this, for your life to make a difference...

- Over the years, one of my favorite stories has been the account of the crazy flight of **Larry Walters**.
 - It's the **STORY** of a guy who got so bored...
 - Some of the details have grown with Internet legend, but the core elements are true. I know, I found an article on the Internet that said so.¹

Genesis 12:1–3

People always start Abram's story in Gen 12, but it really begins back in Gen 11.

Gen 11 is the story of the Tower of Babel, a project that symbolized humanity's rejection of God; their declaration of independence from him; and their wholesale worship of idols. This was a *very* dark age.

There's **one family line** that belongs to God, the descendants of Shem, but at the end of **chapter 11 they live in** a place of idolatry, almost swallowed up by it.

- The **final guy** in this line, **Terah, has one son, Abram,** and Abram is childless. This **looks like the end.**

- **Terah's** name in Hebrew means literally "**moon,**" which was a Hebrew metaphor for "the end." (Like us saying the "**caboose**").
 - **Furthermore, in Ur (where they lived),** people **worshipped the moon.** (So the fact that he's named "moon" means that this family has succumbed to the idolatrous culture and become idolaters themselves.)
- So, **as Gen 11 ends,** the last candle seems to be flickering out. The only godly family on earth has capitulated to idolatry and they aren't having any more kids.
- The **darkness is about to completely swallow** up the light.

[12:1] "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. [2] 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... [3] and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In the midst of this great darkness, God calls a man who barely knows who he is, and one who is childless, to boot, and tells him he is going to make from him a great nation of people who will worship and follow God and bless the whole earth with the knowledge of God.

- It's a promise that **you and I inherited.**
- You see, to make a long story short, **one of Abraham's descendants** was Jesus Christ.
- **In Christ, God offered salvation to the whole world,** and we who are in Christ are now commissioned to bless the world by taking the news about Jesus to all the families in the world.
- **(You see, it's interesting... in Matthew's Gospel, where we get the clearest expression of Great Commission,** Matthew opens the Gospel by tracing the family line between Abraham and Jesus. *The Great Commission is an extension of the promise to Abraham.*)

So Abraham's promise becomes our promise, and his experience serves as a model to us.

¹ http://web.archive.org/web/20070710212757/http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/07/10/flying_lawn_chair.ap/index.html

Abram's call presents each of us with 3 questions we need to ask ourselves:

1. Am I really FOLLOWING God?

- This is a question about who is really in charge of your life—you or God.
- Last week we talked about it as **offering a blank check** to God: no restrictions; no limitations; all I am, all I have all I ever hope to be I offer without reservation to you...
 - Put your yes on the table and let god put it on the map
- His command to Abraham is **intentionally open-ended**. “Go to the land that I **will** show you later.”
 - God said to Abraham, “Go.” And Abraham said, “Where?” and God said, “I’ll show you later.”
 - God said, ‘I’ll give you a son.’ Abraham said, ‘How?’ God answers, ‘I’ll take care of that. Just follow me.’”
- I love how **John Calvin summarized God’s call to Abraham here**: “Just close your eyes and take my hand.” I love that. *Just close your eyes and take my hand.*
 - But “God, what about...” “How will...” *Just close your eyes and take my hand.*
- I see **so many people I talk to unwilling** to do this. When considering following God, they want to know, “Well, God, if I surrender everything to you...
 - **Where you going to make me go?** Do I have to become a **missionary**?
 - Do I have to **change careers**?
 - Will I have to break up with my **boyfriend**?
 - What if you tell me to **change some part of my life that I don’t know how to change yet?**
 - God, am I am going to become one of those **annoying people** who put bumper stickers on their car and tells everybody to ‘have a blessed day’? Who corrects store clerks at Christmastime who say, “Happy Holidays” with “Merry Christmas? God, I don’t want to become one of those people.”

- I used to try and answer those questions for people, but then I realized that this was just people wanting to know exactly where God is going to take them before they’ll follow him. They want to **follow God without getting out of the driver’s seat** of their life, and that is an impossibility.
- **God doesn’t come to you** to serve as an onboard navigation system whose suggestions you can take or leave as you choose. He comes as the new car owner.
 - **I remember that my wife and I got into an argument in the car** shortly after we got married and after a few minutes of silence I had the brilliant idea of telling her how much better life would be if she would just be more like the little British woman who lived in the dash of my car. When I don’t do what she wants she just kind of sighs and says, “Recalculating.” That didn’t help my cause.
- **God doesn’t come to give suggestions** and then recalculate based on your response. He comes for *total surrender*.

We want to know **the what of his will**; he says that all that should matter is **the who...** Just close my eyes and take my hand

- **Let me point out one other thing before I move on to number 2**, this was a calling Abraham had to **respond to personally**.
 - In my study this time I learned **something I’d never seen before...** Chapter 11 ended with Abram’s whole family leaving Ur going to Canaan, under the leadership of Abram’s father in law, Terah (11:31). But then they stop halfway. So chapter 12 is God saying to Abraham, “You come out all the way with me.” Abraham says, “But God, we’ve come half-way. And nobody wants to come any farther.” So literally, what God says to Abraham is, “*Then go yourself out.*” “*Get out yourself.*”
 - **The point: At some point, you have to make your own decision to follow God.** It’s not enough to be in a Christian movement.

- **Here at the Summit Church we are trying to do a lot in God's mission...** Are you personally part of it?
 - We did a **church survey recently that revealed something encouraging**: a lot of people are really excited about what we are doing as a church. **Less than encouraging**: Not nearly as many are **engaged in what** we are doing.
 - *People watch our videos or hear me talk and say, 'Woohoo, I love to hear stories of people coming to know Jesus! Yeah, orphan care! Prison ministry! Mission trips! Volunteering! I sure hope other people will keep doing that so we can keep these stories coming!'*
 - God does not reward you for associating with the right group.
 - You **can't piggyback on our engagement** in the mission. You have to do it yourself.
 - **Are you engaged in the mission?**

2. Where is my SECURITY?

- God wasn't calling Abraham to make God a part of his life or add a **few tweaks** to his morality.
- **He was calling him to a whole new basis of life.**
 - In those days, **family connections and land** were everything.
 - This is the equivalent of God telling us to walk away from our careers and all that you own.
- Are you willing to **put everything** on the table?
 - Alan's. Husband and kids. Curt: career.
 - **Here's the one sure way to know what part of your life you don't really trust God in**—it's the place you won't offer him unconditional obedience.
 - **Where you say**, "not this."

3. Have I offered my blessing back to God to be MULTIPLIED for his kingdom?

- **Becoming a Christ follower means viewing everything in your life as something to be multiplied for God's kingdom.**

- **God is a rich giver**, and a good father who loves to give gifts to his children, but he doesn't give us blessings simply for us to enjoy them.
- **He blesses us so that we can offer those blessings** back to God, so that he can then multiply those blessings in the lives of others.
- **Key passage for the next few weeks: 2 Corinthians 9:10: "He who supplies seed to the sower... will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."**
 - *Why did God bless you?* Multiply your seed.
 - **You see, becoming a Christ-follower** means a **fundamental reshaping** of your life. You look at everything you've been given as a seed for sowing.
 - There are **two things** you can do with a seed... Grind it up for food; plant it.
- Now, some of you are saying, *"Well, J.D., I don't feel very blessed. My life has been pretty hard."*
 - Listen: **No matter who you are**, or what season God has put you in, he has given you seed to sow.
 - Jesus one day observed a **woman who put in only 2 pennies** into the offering (2 mites). She probably didn't feel financially blessed. But Jesus said she gave more than everyone else because she took what God gave her and *multiplied* it.
 - **God doesn't ever call you to give what you don't have**, and you're not always in charge of how your life is going. You are called to take what you have and offer it to God.
 - You can offer even your pain to God. You can say, "God, how can I use this pain to give testimony and glory to you?"
 - I'll leverage my prosperity for the advance of your kingdom; and I'll turn my pain into a testimony of your goodness and faithfulness in the worst situations in life. In the Christian life, nothing is wasted. Everything God gives you can be multiplied.

- **When you sow in God's field**, you "he will... increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous *in every way*, which, through us will produce thanksgiving to God."
 - **God uses you to bless others** in a way that they thank God because of you.
 - **340 baptized in last 3 weeks.** That's a lot of people rejoicing in God's grace. Whole families.
 - Got the **best note about how God put back together their whole family!**
 - **People overseas...** 20 churches in last 6 months that have baptized more than 400... some in UPG's. 38 new believers in a UPG that prior to our going had no believers!

God presents Abraham, and you, with a **stark choice**:

- **Hold on to what you have**, and you'll end up empty. Offer it without restriction to God, and you'll be filled, both you and the world around you.
- **To you: If you want to live a tidy, safe life, without leaving your comfort zone**, you aren't going to be of much use to anybody. But if you open your hands on all of it to God, he'll use it beyond your wildest expectations.

I told you there were 2 applications: for you personally, and for the church... Our team has put together this incredible presentation of where God has us and the opportunities he has put before us...

12 minute VIDEO

Exciting! I believe some of the best days are before us.

Let me explain to you why we do this:

- God has blessed us, and with that blessing comes a responsibility. We can't sit in on it. We have more people to reach. I told you

about the future of RDU... Most of the people moving here are unreached. He blessed us, at this time, to increase our capacity to reach them.

- **To those of you who say, "I don't like it when churches talk about anything that has to do with money."**
 - First, I'll tell you that what I want to teach over the next few weeks is not primarily about money. Time, treasure and talents!
 - This whole journey should **make you ask 3 crucial discipleship questions**:
 - *Have you really fully surrendered to him?*
 - *What do you most TRUST?*
 - *What KINGDOM are you primarily living for?*
 - **Primary/Secondary**
 - **Why? God doesn't need our money!** He uses our offering of ourselves to multiply his kingdom...
- **To those who say, "I feel like we've done this before. A few years ago—All-In... I'm engaged. I'm giving..."**
 - And the last time we did this, **3400 new families** began to give for the first time.
 - Well, we've **added 2000 new people** in average attendance to the church since then.
 - So **if you are already engaged**, won't you be excited to have them join us? Shouldn't we give them that opportunity?
 - **And if you have been here for a while and are already engaged**, will you **let God really challenge you** again... to re-evaluate whether you are following him; trusting him; living for his kingdom?
 - **My experience** with this: People who have honestly sought the will of God about this part of our life don't mind when we talk about it.
 - **Illus. Two guys supposed to be digging a ditch.** The foreman hollers out, "You guys get back to work." The one actually working doesn't object...

- **Calling you to sacrifice is never comfortable, for you or me...** Jesus said to follow him we must pick up the cross daily, which is never comfortable. If your idea of the Christian life is slowly moving toward comfort, then you are not walking with Jesus.
- **Paul called us “living sacrifices.”** The thing about living sacrifices is they keep wanting to get up off the altar
- **But if you say, “Well, churches should never talk about this...”**
Let me ask you: **How do you think the mission goes forward?**
 - **How did you hear the gospel?** You heard it from someone—either in the church or in someone trained by the church.
 - **See, you don’t give to the church; you give through the church, to the mission.**
 - Listen... I say this gently, I would guess that you **if you think the church should never say anything** about money and your role in the mission, that is probably not a fair objection on your part; **just a smokescreen** for you not wanting anyone, including God, to challenge you at the point of your **greatest idol**.
 - **Will you let God have free reign to speak to you here, or are you going to walk out of here and close your heart to him?**

Summit, I believe that what we’re about to go through will change us as a church. Not only is it going to extend our impact in reaching our city, it’s going to change us as a people.

Summit, we have a chance to revolutionize this city for the gospel, and a chance for God to teach us what it really means for us to follow him with reckless abandon and to have our lives make an eternal difference.

A few notes here in Conclusion:

- Be here every week?

- November 21-22, Commitment Weekend, we covenant as a church

Are you willing to pray this prayer for the next 5 weeks? “God, multiply me. I’m ready to follow.”

Here’s why we can do this: What Abraham was asked to do, and did falteringly, through ups and downs, Jesus would come one day and do PERFECTLY.

- Jesus was asked to **go out, alone, leaving his Father’s house**, a place of real security, and go into the unknown. And he did so gladly—for you.
- He became **utterly homeless, utterly fatherless**—so we could have a real home, a heavenly Father.
- **If you understand that the One calling you to follow is the One who left everything for you, you’ll have the courage to leave it all for him.**
 - **You can let go of your little securities for him—because you have ultimate security in him.**
 - **In Christ, I can let go of all that I have, because in Christ you have the promise of all that you’ll need.**
 - **Christ’s sacrifice for you becomes your motivation to sacrifice for him; your security in him becomes your confidence to risk for him whatever he asks.**

“God, multiply me. I’m ready to follow.” Ready to pray this