



Discussion Guide

Promise: Genesis 12.1-5

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Imagine you have just broken your beloved grandmother's prized vase. Oh, and it can't be replaced. You have 5 minutes before she returns. What do you do?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *So, the world is broken. We all know that. What we don't know is how to fix it. Sure, we all have our ideas, solutions if people would just act upon would make the world a better place. I don't know about you, but I have heard some pretty ingenious solutions. Some of them might just work. There is just one problem. People. People keep mucking it up. All the best plans come to naught as people try to implement them. It seems that people themselves are a large part of the problem. People need. I need. You need a solution that comes from a different place, a solution that has very little to do with people having to carry it out. Is such a solution to be found?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Genesis 12.1-5. (You might consider recapping Genesis 1-11 for the group to provide context.)
- What did God call Abram to do? (Tip: Look down through the text to draw out all the possible ideas.)
- Imagine you are Abram. What, if anything, about God's calling would be difficult for you? What would it take to respond to God's calling?
- God promises to bless Abram, and to use Abram to be a blessing. In so doing, God promises to move to provide a way back to life as it was meant to be. (See *Blessing* in Context and Background). Considering the story of Genesis 1-11, what do these promises teach us about God? What do they teach us about the solution to brokenness in life?
- God's promises to Abram, at the very least, demonstrate that God is good and loving, and that in Him alone is the path back to life as it was meant to be. Is this how people typically think of God and life? Can you elaborate?
- If God is good and loving, and if He is the way back to life, what might be some implications of these truths for our lives today?
- What might acting on these implications look like?
- Do you find that acting upon these implications is difficult or easy for you? Can you elaborate?
- What steps might you be willing to take to move toward acting upon these implications?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group Prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)



Group Notes

Promise: Discussion Guide

Genesis 12.1-5

Context and Background

Abraham's world: Abraham lived in a world that was much different from our own. The biblical text does not tell us exactly when Abraham lived, though we can probably say he lived about 2,000 years before Jesus was born. We know from archaeology, that this time period was filled with migrations of people, the forming of ancient cities as people shifted from a nomadic to urban life, and conflicts between rising powers. The Bible paints something of a spiritual portrait of the world of Abraham in Genesis 3-11. After the Fall (Genesis 3), the world began to spiral downward, both morally and spiritually. Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4.1-17), which led to an escalation of violence (Genesis 4.19-26). People multiplied as God had instructed them, but for a time it seems as if they lost connection with God Himself (Genesis 4.26). The relationship with God seems to be completely severed by the time of Noah with wickedness becoming the norm and people engaging in acts that seem to be efforts to become like God (Genesis 6.1-8). God moved to thwart the progression of evil by flooding the world and sparing Noah and his family, something akin to a reboot for the world. However, this rebooting action only temporarily hinders rather than halts the progression of evil. With the Tower of Babel, it is apparent that people are still separated from God and making attempts to be like Him, to be their own god (Genesis 11.1-9). Therefore, God is forced to disperse people in an effort to thwart their intentions to attain divine status (Genesis 11.4-7). When Abraham is born, he is born into a world in which people are separated from God and from one another. Evil and wickedness are a way of life, rather than the exception. Not even a shadow of life as it was created to be remains with people experiencing an ever-downward trend in morality and spirituality.

Blessing: To bless in the ancient world meant to bestow favor and good upon the person or object being blessed. Blessing brought power for and an enhancement to life. God could bless people, people could bless God, and people could bless people. In Genesis, God is portrayed as the source of blessing. That is, God is the original source for goodness in life. His blessing upon life—both animal and human—was the state in which all life existed (Genesis 1.22, 28; 2.3; and 5.2). In the opening chapters of Genesis (Genesis 1-11), the word “bless” appears five times with God as the sole subject. Each of these uses refers to God’s original creative intentions except for God’s blessing of Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.1). However, in this instance, God seems to be blessing Noah and his sons in an act meant to bestow His creative intentions through His act of re-creation after the flood. Thus, one might say, in Genesis 1-11, God’s blessing refers to God’s creative intentions. It is interesting to note that after Genesis 1-11, the word “to bless” appears five times in Genesis 12.1-3 alone, and is henceforth associated with Abraham and his descendants. It is difficult to see how the use of the term would differ drastically in Genesis 12.1-3 from its use in Genesis 1-11. In fact, Genesis 9.1 seems to be a paradigm for how “blessing” might be used in Genesis 12.1-3. God’s blessing of Abram seems to be an act of God aimed at re-creation. Through His blessing of Abram, God moves to restore creation to its original state. Thus, in the story of Abram, we find what is perhaps one of the most important turning points in Scripture, for we find God moving to reverse the effects of this Fall (Genesis 3) so that people might experience life as it was meant to be (Genesis 1-2).

The Text

The call (Genesis 12.1): The text begins with the accounting of the family line of a man by the name of Terah (Genesis 11.27). From this line descended a man by the name of Abram who was married to a woman named Sarai. It is stated that Sarai was barren (Genesis 11.30). This should stop the accounting of this family as there was no means for it to continue. However, the story does continue as God intervenes in Abram’s life. God moves to call Abram to do something very difficult. God calls Abram to leave everything that would have given him identity and meaning and begin walking to a land that was not yet revealed. It is important to note also that at this point Abram has no stated relationship with the God who is calling to him. The magnitude of the calling is easy to miss. Abram lived in a culture in which a person found their identity and meaning through their relationships and connections with others and the land in which they lived. God asked Abram to give up his land, the people who gave him identity, and any inheritance he might gain from his family to follow a God Abram did not know in a time in which gods were viewed to be local deities tied to the land. Thus, if God was in Haran, would He still be in the land He was telling Abram to travel to? If Abram is to respond to this call it will take something called faith, a whole-hearted trust in the God who is calling him and a commitment of his life to this God’s purposes and intentions.

The promise (Genesis 12.2-3): While God asks Abram to give everything up that gave him identity and meaning, He promised to replace it all. God promised to give Abram a land in place of the land he was in. He would make Abram a nation in place of giving up his own people. In place of his family and the inheritance that came through it, God would bestow honor upon Abram’s own family. It is important to remember that Abram is at this point childless, does not know the land of which God is speaking, and thus has no relationship upon which to judge the veracity of the promises of God. It is also important to note the reason behind these promises. God intends a three-fold blessing: a blessing upon Abram, that Abram will be a blessing-bearer, and that through Abram all people would receive blessing. If the use of blessing is a means of referring to God’s creative intentions (See *Blessing*) then God is saying that He is going to give to Abram the life meant in creation and in turn that Abram will be part of taking this creation life to all people. It is interesting to note the echo of the blessing of all people in Genesis 1.28 and 12.3. It seems that the promise to Abram is a promise to restore life back to what it was meant to be. All that is required of Abram is a faithful response.

The response (Genesis 12.4-5): Abram chooses to trust God and answers His call. In so doing, Abram becomes part of something much bigger than himself. Abram becomes part of God’s movement to restore all of creation to God’s original intention. His faithful response brings God’s movement into his own life which in turn allows God to use Abram as a conduit to bring blessing to all people across all ages.

Application: So, the world is messed up. We all know that, but do we know that God has moved to provide a way back, a way back to life as it was meant to be? We see the first glimmers of this movement in the promise made to Abram. In a time in which morality and spirituality were spiraling downward, God moved. He moved to restore His creative blessing to all people through one man, Abram. Through and in this man would come the hope for all people. How this hope for life can be realized might be seen in what made God’s promise effective for Abram himself, faith. In faith, the orientation of one’s life around God and His intentions, one finds blessing, a way back to life as it was meant to be.