

# Unexpected Calling

Genesis 12:1-9

June 11, 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

Years ago while working at Atomic Energy, I came to a point where I had to decide where to put my energy: in the business world, or in my passion – church and teaching.

It was a hard decision because I loved my job. More importantly, I loved the people I worked with. There were about 24 people in the branch from about 15 countries and representing 6 different religions. We had great discussions at times.

I remember telling God that, if he wanted me back in ministry, he would have to make me hate my job. Within a year, I had been promoted, transferred to a different branch, hated what I was doing and hated some of the people I was working with. I quit and, got a part-time job in the ministry and returned to graduate studies.

The problem, of course, is that I was comfortable – too comfortable. I liked what I was doing and didn't want to move on. I didn't want to change. But, until I was **willing to change**, God was limited in how much he could use me.

Which brings us to our Old Testament passage – the story of Abraham.

## BIBLICAL EXPLORATION

### The Story of Abraham

Our Old Testament passage brings us to the very beginning of Abraham's story. He isn't even called Abraham yet – he's just Abram.

Here, at the beginning of the story, he's 75 years old, married but his wife is barren and he has no children. That's all we know about him. We're not even told that Abram was a particularly good or righteous man, or even that he knew or followed God.

What we do know is that, for some strange reason, God called Abram. It was an unexpected calling. For some strange reason – again unknown – Abram responded.

It was an unexpected calling – we're never told why God chose Abram or even God asked him to leave his homeland – but Abram responded and God was able to work through him to accomplish some unimaginable – to us. God promised to make Abram the father of a great nation – and he did. Abram is the patriarch in three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam – or about 54% of the world's population. Pretty impressive for someone with no heirs at this point.

Abram's response is also unexpected. I don't know about you but, as I get older, I begin to think more about family. I'd like to live closer to relatives. I'd like to have family around me in case I get sick. When I die, I would like to have family close by to look after my remains.

I know it's dangerous to attribute motives or feelings into biblical texts – into any text – but I would suspect that Abram had similar feelings. He was 75 years old. It was time to start taking it easy – settle down if he could. Why would Abraham want to move away from his hometown, his country, his father's family and relatives? To go where? God didn't tell him where – just "I'll show you" – talk about being vague! Trust the Lord.

Who knows how well Abram knew God at this point but he knew that someone or something was calling him to change – to get up and move. Abram did.

But he must have had tremendous courage and a willingness to trust this being who called him to change.  
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### God's Story

But there's more to the story than Abram. It's also the story of God. What do we learn about God in this passage?

- First, we learn that God is interested in what is going on in the world. He breaks into time and space to become involved in the life of human beings.
- Second, we learn that God chooses whomever he wants, for whatever reason he has and he doesn't always explain himself
- Finally, we discover that God knows us well enough to know our limitations and takes them into account.

God did not ask Abram to go into the unknown, leaving behind everything and everyone he knew.

- **God took Abram's age into account.**

Young people may be very willing to rough it. I know I thought nothing about taking a bus from Montreal to Montana when I was younger, or even from Toronto to Vancouver and back a few years ago. When I was younger, my dream was to go horseback riding through Europe like a friend of mine did.

Now that I'm older, however, I find I prefer travelling by train rather than by bus, and prefer staying in hotels with all the amenities I'm used to. One dream is to go horseback riding in the Rockies – but on day-trips, not overnight expeditions.

We find God accommodating Abram. God calls Abram to **go and leave** the familiar for an unknown future, but he also tells Abram **take your wife, nephew, people, and possessions**. Abram didn't have to rough it.

- **God took Abram's energy level into account.**

As we get older, we tend to slow down a bit and our energy level changes – at least mine has. I can still do long hauls but I like to have a few more breaks than I did as a youngster. We see the same tendency in Abram's travels.

God doesn't tell Abram where he would go or end up – God didn't tell Abram how far he would travel – but we read that Abram travelled in stages: **first** to *Shechem*; **then** on past *Bethel*; and **finally** on towards the *Negeb*. Later, we see Abram travelling on to Egypt.

What God reveals of himself in this passage is his compassion for the human condition and his willingness to work within our limitations.

### A Relational Story

Today's Old Testament reading is more than a story about Abram or even about God. It's a **story about the relationship** between Abram and God – or rather, it's the story about the beginning of that relationship.

- At the very beginning – God speaks.  
Does Abram hear – or not? Does Abram respond – or not?  
God offers an invitation and it's up to Abram to do with it as he wants.
- Abram responds and the next encounter we hear is God appearing to Abram.  
Trusting in the small things can lead to a deeper relationship in the long-term.

- It begins with God commanding, and Abram hearing and obeying but, as the Genesis narrative unfolds, we discover a relationship where God and Abram interact on a deeper level we find arguments, discussions, and even Abram bargaining with God and getting away with it.

God is not a stand-offish God – who commands, expects to be obeyed, and that’s all.

God is a hands-on God – who commands, expects to be obeyed, but cares about us, takes our needs into consideration, interacts with us on any number of levels – and keeps trying to break through into our lives today.

## BRIDGE

Today...

As with most biblical stories, the question we’re left with is *so what?* Who cares what happened 3000 years ago? What does the story have to say to us today?

## A MESSAGE FOR TODAY

### A Message for Individuals

The passage speaks to us as individuals.

- God called *one person*. He spoke on a one-to-one basis with one person. God is calling us – each one of us. He is inviting us to respond – he has a plan for each one of us, if we’re willing to hear.
- God calls each one of us *into a relationship*. He wants to be involved in our lives – and wants us to be involved in His.
- We are free to respond or not. We might feel that we’re nothing special – that we’re too old, too settled, don’t have enough training – don’t have enough time ... and none of that matters. Not to God.

Our Old Testament lesson reminds us that God’s calls are often unexpected and that God chooses unexpected people – people who wouldn’t be our first choice.

Our Old Testament lesson reminds that God calls us, knowing our limitations and willing to work within them or even to transform them. By the end of the Abram’s story, he has a new name –

Abraham – he has been transformed by his encounter and walk with God ... as we will be in *our* walk with God.

The question – and the challenge – for us as individuals is the same that Abram faced: ***When God calls, how will we respond?***

### A Message for the Congregation

At the same time, this passage speaks to us as a congregation – or congregations – of St. Andrew’s and St. Andrew’s-Knox.

God called us into existence 197 years ago. Our ancestors responded, and years later ancestors built this building.

In some ways, we have the same problems that Abram faced: aging members; few children, if any; and the limitations that those facts create.

Abram didn’t know where he was going –neither do we. What the future will bring.

OK – it’s not quite the same. In our passage from Genesis, God calls Abram ***out of his homeland into the unknown*** while today God calls Rev. Ian to leave at the end of the year and calls us ***to stay and face the unknown***.

Where will that take us – or leave us? What will the future hold?

**CONCLUSION**

We don't know, any more than Abram did. He was willing to trust God and step into the unknown. Look what God accomplished through him – over 54% of the world's population trace themselves back to a 75-year-old man who heard God's voice and answered.

God is calling us – are we willing to trust God and step into the unknown? Do we have the same kind of courage that Abram did? Are we willing to let God work in us and through us? If so, what wonders might he achieve? How might our walk with God – our relationship – deepen?

Something to think about.

AMEN.