

*A Gracious Blessing*  
Genesis 12:1-9  
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This summer we're going to be in Genesis hearing the stories of really messy, flawed people. I love these stories because the people in them—Sarai and Abram and Hagar and Isaac and Rebekah and Leah and Rachel and Jacob and Esau—are pretty much anything but saintly. At best they're a mess. At worst, they lie and cheat and hurt people. And yet, God is gracious to them and committed to using them for good in the world. That gives me hope because I am also a very messy, flawed person. We don't have to be perfect. In fact, God almost seems to prefer people who aren't. We start today with Abram and Sarai. Later, they'll be renamed Abraham and Sarah, but for now, they're Abram and Sarai.

**Genesis 12:1-9**

*12 The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.*

*<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
those who curse you I will curse;  
all the families of the earth  
will be blessed because of you."*

*<sup>4</sup> Abram left just as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.<sup>5</sup> Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, <sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites lived in the land at that time.<sup>7</sup> The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I give this land to your descendants," so Abram built an altar there to the Lord who appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> From there he traveled toward the mountains east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and worshipped in the Lord's name. <sup>9</sup> Then Abram set out toward the arid southern plain, making and breaking camp as he went.*

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God said to Abram, get up and go. And Abram went.

Can you imagine? Leaving *everything*? Everything you've ever known. All the people you've ever known? Sarai and Abram didn't have a perfect life. They hadn't been able to have a child, and they'd both lost their parents, but even so, their life was comfortable. They were from a prominent family in a big city.

And God calls them away from that. Leave it all behind, God says. I've chosen you. I've chosen you for blessing; I've chosen you to bless others.

There are big calls in life. Far too often we just conflate call with our jobs. And our work certainly can be a call, but that isn't the only or even primary way God calls us. Sometimes God calls us to pick up and move across the country, start a family, or decide not to start a family, to get sober or make some other enormous change. But there are also more subtle calls that can take the form of longing for community, the urge for prayer, the pull of friendship, the desire for rest or sanity or gratitude.

We don't always use the word call for those experiences, and that's fine. But even if it's nothing louder than an intuition in the gut, or as ordinary as a call from the nominating committee, there's still a voice summoning us away from where we've been and into something new. If you have trouble conceiving of God—and really, who doesn't?—this might be one way to think about God. God is the One, the Force, the Impulse that calls us forward. God is the Wind that blows us, or the Gravity that draws us into being the body of Christ in the world.

I wonder if Abram ever wondered “why me?” It's a valid question. The text doesn't tell us anything special about him or Sarai. Abram's 75. Sarai's unable to have a child. They are wealthy. They're just people. That's it. So, why Abram? Why Sarai?

The story doesn't give us any reason why God chose them specifically.

It can't be that they were particularly saintly people. Before this chapter is over, Abram and Sarai will move on to Egypt. When they get there, Abram will force Sarai to pretend that she is not his wife but his sister, and he will sell her to Pharaoh for his harem. Later they will team up to abuse Sarai's slave Hagar and ultimately leave her and her infant son in the desert to die.

This is the stuff people leave out when they pontificate on “biblical family values.”

But God calls them anyway and intends to use them for good in the world. This is apparently how God works. At least biblically, this is God's primary way of interacting. Sometimes there's flashy stuff like parting the Red Sea, but mostly God just works through ordinary people to be a force for good in the world.

But still, why Abram and Sarai? I think if they had asked God, God might have said, it's not about you. Because it's not. It's not really about them. It's not about who they are or who they've been or even who they'll become. And the blessings that are promised—becoming a great nation, getting lots of land, having a child—those aren't really about them either.

I'm blessing you, God says, so that, through you, all of the world will be blessed. I'm choosing you, so that everyone else will be chosen, too. Abram and Sarai are called *for everyone else*, for all the outsiders who don't feel chosen—those are the people Abram and Sarai are called for, the reason they're blessed.

This is how blessing works. It doesn't stop. It moves. Gifts and blessings are intended to keep moving, to be passed on, paid forward. They are never meant to stay with the initial recipient. They are never to be hoarded. And blessing should not be conflated with privilege. Blessing is not prosperity gospel where if you act right, God will give you wealth. Blessing is completely unearned. It's that experience of utterly unexpected graciousness. It might come in the form of an unexpected material gift. But more often it doesn't. It comes in the form of kindness and healing and mercy, and skills and gifts we did nothing to earn. And it is always intended to overflow. The purpose of any call and any blessing is to overflow in love to everybody else. Think of a blessing you've received. How does it, or how could it, overflow?

Because Abram and Sarai are chosen, because they know their worth and call, they eventually come to see blessings all around them, and that goodness cascades down in all sorts of surprising ways. They don't always get it right. They make a lot of mistakes, and they still have plenty of heartache and struggle. But their lives are shaped by this call, and their yes, and the goodness that flows from that.

That's the kind of life God calls us to. It's not a perfect life, or a shiny life, or a life unmarked by hardship or bad choices. But it is a life of surprising blessing. God blesses each person so that our whole world will be shaped by blessing, so that we'll go around bearing hope and giving mercy and offering healing and giving good gifts to the rest of the world. That's ultimately the call for each of us and all of us—to be regular people who bless the world.

~ Sarah W. Wiles, 2023