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Back to the Garden
Genesis 12:1-9
August 23rd, 2015, Pastor Jeff Germs

Every Monday I sit in Starbucks and work on my sermon. I find a comfortable chair, if there's one available. I might have some conversation with some of the regulars. And then I put my ear plugs in and focus in on the task at hand. Every once in a while I look around at the various groups of people deep in conversation. And I've noticed something. Almost everyone, in some form or another, talks about relationship, whether it is gossiping about someone, or having a discussion about how to deal with a difficult situation in a relationship.

I think most people, at a heart level, know that life is about relationship. When our relationships are good we feel at peace. When our relationships are not what they should be we feel unsettled.

Some of us are more sensitive than others that way. If there is a relationship in which I don't have peace it's constantly on my mind. It keeps me awake at night. I cannot settle until I set things right.

That's because God originally created us to have peace in our relationships and when we don't it troubles us deeply. Good relationships are hard work.

"They" say the only two things we can be sure of in life are death and taxes, but there is something else we can be sure of, and that is that **we will disappoint one another.**

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It's a part of having relationships. We each enter into a given relationship with diverse backgrounds, experience, levels of maturity, and expectations.

We have to accept that misunderstandings are going to happen. We will have conflict in all our relationships. And by conflict I mean differing opinions. Conflict is not bad, but how we deal with conflict may or may not be. If we are living according to the fruit of the Spirit, conflict will be healthy. And if there is not conflict, that is healthy conflict, there is something wrong with the relationship. Usually when there seems to be no conflict on the surface, at least, it's a one side arrangement with the weaker person always giving consent, whether or not he or she agrees.

This is true of all kinds of relationships whether it is a marriage, friendship, employee/ employer, pastor/parishioner, or whatever. We will all disappoint and misunderstand one another because we have varied backgrounds and expectations.

As your pastor, if I haven't done so already, you can be sure I will disappoint, or misunderstand you at some time, and you may do the same to me. I don't want to, but I will, simply because none of us is perfect, and we all have different expectations, personalities, and ways of expressing ourselves, in our relationships.

And the less spiritually and emotionally mature we are, the more difficult good relationships are because the immature person either believes that everything is about them, or, on the other side of the extreme, everything is about the other person.

Ever since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, relationships have been hard work. But since then God has been up to something.

We're going to take a look at Genesis 12:1-9 today, which means that there is a bunch of stuff that has taken place before this that sets the stage of history.

So, what I'd like you to do is help me by telling me what were some of the major events between creation in Genesis 1 and the call of Abram in Genesis 12.

You can open up your Bible if you want and walk through it with me.

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- Genesis 1&2 - Creation - God said "It is very good." Perfect. Peace. Joy. Love. Harmony.

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- Genesis 3 - The fall. Everything broke. Relationships became hard. Nobody took responsibility for their own sin and garbage. They pointed the finger and blamed everyone else.

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- Genesis 4 - Cain kills Abel.

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- Genesis 6-9 - Sin gets so bad God decided to start over and sends a flood. Through one righteous man, Noah and his family he began again. Noah built a huge boat to save his family and enough of the animals to start over once the flood receded.

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- Genesis 10 - Noah's family repopulates the earth. There was one language. One family.

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- Genesis 11 - The Tower of Babel. The people decide they don't need God. They think they are going to build a tower that will reach to the heavens without God. God decides to give them different languages to confuse things a bit so they see their need of him. The people scattered all over the world according to their language.

Now, what were those events, since The Fall, characterized by. How would you sum it up?

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- Chaos

[10]

- Depravity

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- Movement away from God

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- **Relationships were in jeopardy**

Ever since The Fall, the natural inclination of all of our hearts is to think we don't need God. Without the Holy Spirit we naturally move away from him. And without him and his work in our hearts we are lost in every way. We are broken beyond repair. We are naturally selfish and focused inward. Our number one goal, since the fall, has been to survive. And as long as self-

preservation is our goal, good relationships will be impossible because we will think that the most important thing in life is that we win or survive. Life then becomes all about my story to the neglect of your story and with no thought that there is something greater going on than what is happening in my life.

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Fortunately, **God had a plan to bring us back to the peace that was once in the garden.** That brings us to our text for the day. Abram enters the scene and God offers him a future. Look at what God is up to.

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Genesis 12:1–4 (NLT)

¹ The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

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³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

Some people say that Abram & Sarai had a difficult decision to make here. They were living in Haran with Abram's family. They would have had some inheritance if they stayed there. It was more or less a sure thing.

But Sarai was barren. She could not have children. Ruthie and I weren't able to have kids, and we had to struggle together quite a bit through the implications of that and come to terms with growing old without children. And it has been somewhat difficult for us.

When we were younger, people would joke about when we were going to do our part in populating the earth. They had no idea how much it hurt us. Now that we are older, people expect that we should have kids and so they ask about our supposed kids. They don't ask if we have kids. They assume we do and they ask how many kids we have. And then we have to go through the whole thing of explaining that we don't have any and why. It has been a painful road for us as it is for any couple who struggles with infertility. But our pain is nothing like it would have been for Abram and Sarai.

In that culture, to have no son to carry your name forward meant you were nothing. You were dead. Your name died with you. The idea in the peoples of Mesopotamia was that the blessing of the gods was equated with an abundance of descendants. No descendants equaled no blessing - no future.

So, needless to say, Sarai and Abram felt like second class citizens. They were already elderly and well past the childbearing years, so when God offered to make Abram's name great and make him into a great nation I think, in his mind, there was no other alternative.

He jumped at the chance to have a future. I don't think he had to think twice about it. They had no idea where they were going. The only thing God told them was that they were to step

out and he would show them the land they were to go to. Scary? Perhaps. But, safe, because God was giving them a future.

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What did God offer Abram?

- He would become a great nation (v.2)

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- His name would become great (v. 2)

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- He would be blessed to be a blessing (v. 2)

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- He would have protection from God (v. 3)

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- All peoples on the earth from then until eternity would be touched by his life (v. 2, 3)

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- He would have a future (v. 2, 3)

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What was God's plan for Abram all about?

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- He would be an instrument to bring peace back to relationships with God and people

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- He would be a channel to restore the peace that was once in the Garden of Eden

The key to understanding what life is about is knowing that...

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God is all about restoring relationships, and Satan is all about destroying them.

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2 Corinthians 2:10–11 (NLT)

¹⁰ When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, ¹¹ so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes.

Satan is all about destroying relationships. If he can break unity in families, if he can break unity in church ministries, if he can destroy relationships between you and me he has delivered a huge blow to the work God is trying to do through us. That's why Jesus, just before he was crucified, prayed in John 17, for unity, not only for his current disciples, but for you and me – his future disciples.

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John 17:21 (NLT)

²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

Jesus gave us a mission in Matthew 28:19-20

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Go and make disciples by teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

That is our mission. It is the business we are in. It is why we exist. Our mission never changes. He told us to make disciples by teaching them to obey him, and he said it can all be summed up in two commands, "Love God, and Love People."

That mission will never change. It is what he instituted for the church to do while we await his return.

He has given us our mission and said, "Ok, now use the gifts and strengths I have given you. Use the brain you were born with. Work with the people in the church I am building and fulfill my mission. How you do that is up to you as long as you stay within in the bounds of my Word."

God has placed us around people who need Jesus. He has placed us there to be a blessing to them so they see Jesus in us. The desire of God's heart is that relationship would be restored between God and people and between us and others. And he wants to use us to fulfill that mission. That is what he is all about. That is what the church is all about.

I come from quite a large family. There are seven kids. I'm the second oldest. I have one older sister. Each of the kids, aside from one, is living for the Lord. And I have had a good relationship with all of them with the exception of one brother. Our relationship had been strained since we were kids. I had prayed for him for many years that God would somehow heal the rift that had grown between us. He has lived in Finland for over 20 years so it has been very difficult to connect in any meaningful way.

Almost fifteen years ago Ruthie and I went to Finland to visit them thinking we could work towards some healing. Well, it didn't work out that way. It actually made things worse. Neither my brother or I had the maturity to get it right.

Over the last year or so God has been burdening me to pray more for him. That desire had been intensifying because I felt like I had been standing in the way of him seeing Jesus. I wanted so badly to go to Finland to visit again, but we had not been able to afford to go. So, I kept praying.

A couple months ago my aunt whom I have never before communicated with and, who, as far as I know, is not a believer, sent me a Facebook message saying she has felt bad that my parents have never been able to visit my brother and his new family in Finland. He remarried a lady with three kids and then they had one together about four years ago. So, she said she would like to pay their way and mine if I would go with them and help them navigate through airports. God is so amazing! He cares so much about relationships. That is what he is all about.

July 22nd we went to Finland to visit my brother and his family. I had the most amazing time with him. I asked him what it was like for him growing up in our family. We talked for hours about growing up and the causes of the rift between us. We asked for forgiveness and

granted it to each other. All the walls came down. There is a wonderful *shalom* between us now. It is phenomenal.

Since that relationship has been healed I have a peace in my spirit like I have never before experienced. That what life is all about. God created us for relationship. He is all about restoring relationships. He is the Great Reconciler. His goal for us, just like it was for Abram and Sarai, is to bring us back to that same kind of *shalom* that was in the garden of Eden at the beginning of time before we were broken, so that others would see Jesus in us.

That is what God is up to, and we have the awesome privilege of being a part of his work. I've talked about *shalom* before and most of you likely know what it is, but for those who don't, the English word for the Hebrew word *shalom* is 'peace.' But, it's a certain kind of peace. It basically means harmony, or a lack of dissonance. It means that I can look at you and you can look at me and know that everything is okay between us. I owe you nothing. You owe me nothing. The books are balanced. There is no business left unfinished between us. There is peace, harmony, *shalom*. That is God desire for all of our relationships.

This is why we are so purposeful in our Growth Groups about doing the sermon based curriculum. If we are going to grow to become more like Jesus we need to be purposeful.

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We will not coast into maturity. We will not coast into good relationships. We have to enter into purposeful training with Jesus.

Do you have relationships in need of repair? Pray to the The Great Reconciler, the God who is the expert at healing damaged relationships. Pray that he would create some divine opportunities for you to make things right. Pray that he would give you the courage to do the right thing. Pray that he would give you the words of life to help knock down the walls that have come between you and the other person. That is God's desire for you. Peace is only possible when relationships are right.

When we start to move in that direction we will see the hand of God move. We will see him work in ways that we have never before experienced. We will see revival come to our hearts and it will become contagious as people see Jesus in us.