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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
The Promise
Genesis 12-17
September 17, 2017, Jeff Germon

This is the second sermon in our new series, *Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is*. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. In John 1:1-3 we see that all creation was formed by Jesus. So, he is not only the author of our faith, he is the author of all life. Without him there would be no life, both in the physical realm and the spiritual realm. Our lives then, our little stories, are in the middle God's big story.

Last week we started our sermon series way back at the very beginning of time, in Genesis 1-3. We saw that God's plan for peace, trust, authenticity and love was broken by the fall of humankind in the Garden when Adam and Eve chose to believe the lie of Satan that they could find satisfaction and reach their full potential outside of God. The consequence of that movement away from God was devastating. Not only would life be hard for all humanity from that point on, but so would all relationships. The trust they had had with each other and with God was replaced by suspicion, finger pointing, blaming, covering up, shame, fear, insecurity, and a me-first attitude. True peace, joy, love, and authenticity were, consequently, broken.

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We saw that, since that time, **God has been up to something**. There is a thread running all through Scripture. It weaves together all history and points to God's answer to our greatest problem and our deepest longings.

As we saw last week, **one of the consequences of the fall is that we try to remove ourselves as characters in God's big story.**

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We wrongly think we can write a better story without him. With the advent of Jesus, God made a way for us and invites us back into his story to give us our life back. He has promised to restore the peace that was lost back in the garden and to give us the rest we all long for. His desire for us is that we would all live the full and satisfying life he initially had planned for us back in the Garden.

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God wants to make something beautiful out of our messy lives.

Today we are going to continue the narrative we began last week. We are going to fast forward to Genesis 12 where we will look at the call of Abraham and see how that call relates to us in twenty first century Campbell River.

Pay careful attention because Abraham was a key part of God's solution to the terrible mess humanity got themselves into. God's call on Abraham was a crucial part of his plan to bring back the peace that was lost in the Garden. This project continues today. He is gathering for himself a people who is fully committed to participating with him in his great rescue mission.

Before we look at Abe, we need to rewind a few chapters because between chapters three and twelve of Genesis a whole bunch of drama happens. The consequences of the fall were devastating.

In chapter four of Genesis we see that the suspicion, mistrust, jealousy, fear, shame, blaming and broken relationships that reared its ugly head at The Fall continued to build in intensity. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. We don't have time to look at the story, but in a fit of jealousy **Cain killed his brother Abel**. Humanity carried on its same course away from God.

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Adam and Eve continued to populate the earth. At that time, people lived for hundreds of years, so over many long generations the Adam and Eve family grew and they carried with it the same propensity to move away from God, to mistrust, hate, and think only of themselves.

God initially created human beings for authentic relationship, with himself and with each other. He created us to live in authenticity, unity, love, peace and joy. His intention was that we would be meaningfully engaged in life with each other and with him, that we would always be motivated by love, that we would enjoy each other in complete authentic unity, knowing that we have each others' best in mind.

That was God's plan for us and that is how it was before the fall. Things went from bad to worse to disastrous.

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Genesis 6:5-7 (NLT)

⁵ The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. ⁶ So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. ⁷ And the Lord said, "I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them."

There was only one man on earth whose heart was towards God. Only Noah found favour with God. You know the story. God sent a flood to wipe out every living thing with the exception of Noah and his family and two of each of the animals so they could begin again.

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You can read that account in Genesis 6-9. Noah and his family start over. They again work at populating the earth. They have a fresh start, but sin was so entrenched in their psyche that it didn't take long for relationships to begin to break down once again.

Humanity continued their movement away from God thinking they could chart their own course. In **chapter 11**, in an attempt to separate themselves yet once more from God, they erected for themselves a huge structure that we call **The Tower of Babel**.

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By doing so they were trying to reach "the gods." It was a purposeful act of rebellion away from the one true God. By erecting this edifice they were saying they didn't need God. They could write their own story.

God intervened again. Up until that time there was only one language. He gave them different languages which confused things greatly for them and they spread out all over the world and continued their move away from God.

This is something we each need to own.

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Left to our own devices, without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, our most natural inclination is to move away from God. This is another consistent thread that works its way throughout history.

If you think that's not true of you, you are in a very dangerous place and on the way to thinking you can write your own story and be your own god.

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The only antidote to this terrible disease of independence from God is to humbly own our brokenness and surrender ourselves to the loving care of Jesus.

So, God's great plan to restore his *shalom* and rest to humanity continued. This same thread weaves its way through God's story. You can see there are, actually, three threads running concurrently throughout history.

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There is the human thread that tries to move away from God. Alongside that dark thread is a scarlet thread of God continually working to restore humankind back to himself and to each other. There is another consistent thread weaving through history, which is Satan trying to thwart God's plans for peace. We need to understand these three threads if we are going to live the satisfying lives we were created for.

- 1. God is all about restoring his *shalom* to creation**
- 2. Satan is all about destroying God's *shalom***
- 3. We most naturally move away from God**

So, you can see, that if we are left to our own devices, without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we don't stand a chance. However, God has a plan. We don't have to be left to our own devices.

We pick it up in Genesis 12.

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Genesis 12:1-3 (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. 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."

Abraham was seventy five years old when he received this call from God, and Sarah was about ten years younger. They had no children. Sarah had been unable to conceive. And God gave them a ridiculous promise of descendants that would number the stars in the sky and the sand on the shores.

There is a lot of drama that happens in the following chapters of Genesis as we follow Abraham's life. He was not a perfect God follower. Neither was his wife Sarah. Over their long lives, God continually chipped away at their rough characters until they were ready to surrender everything to him. I recommend you read Genesis 12-17 and see how broken they were. Many times Abe and Sarah took matters in their own hands because they didn't trust that God would be good for his promises. But God patiently worked in their hearts and brought them to that place of trust.

This is the same thing God does with us.

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The number one lesson for us, as followers of Jesus, is to learn to trust him and cooperate with him in everything.

What is going on in your life right now that is difficult? What are you tempted to worry about? That is the very thing God wants to use to teach you to trust him.

What is the thing in your history that causes you the most shame? That is the very thing God will use for your good and his glory if you let him. Satan would have us believe that we have to stay in hiding and that we are beyond help. That's a lie. What God wants to do, as we walk with Jesus, is to teach us that he is trustworthy in everything. He wants to call us out of the darkness and into the light so we can have fellowship with each other and with him. He wants to get us to the place where we believe from our hearts what his Word says about us in Romans 8:28.

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Romans 8:28 (NLT)

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

What this is saying is that God has grace for us – past, present and future. What he wants to do in our journey with Jesus is get us to the place where we trust him completely in **all** our circumstances.

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No matter what happens, no matter what is coming down the pipe, we can know that God can use it for our good and his glory. We simply need to trust him and do the next right thing. Do the next right thing and trust him.

This is what trust and cooperating with God looks like. Trust is not passive. It is actively giving our anxiety to him and then doing the next right thing.

Back to Abraham.

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God called Abraham, out of a pagan home. Abraham's family worshiped a plurality of gods. They didn't know the one true God, Yahweh, until he introduced himself in Genesis 12 and offered Abe and Sarah a life.

In that time, if you did not have children you did not have a future. Your name would die with you and that was the worst possible fate. Ruth and I couldn't have children, and I know that there are others here in that same boat and we know the pain of not being able to have a family. But, believe me, the pain we feel is nothing like the pain they felt. In that culture if you did not have a son to carry on your name you were less than nothing. You were thought of as someone who was cursed by the gods.

When we read this passage of Scripture about the call of Abraham and see that God called them to leave the safety of their familiar homeland where all their relatives and friends were, we think that it was such a great sacrifice for them. I suppose there was some sacrifice since they were leaving their family and place of familiarity, heading into the unknown. But actually, Abraham and Sarah saw it as their only option. Yahweh was offering them a life.

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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. 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."

This was the fantasy of everyone back then, to have a huge family to carry on their name. The more kids the better. The more descendants you had the greater you were thought of.

Abraham, 75, and Sarah, 65, were living with the shame of being childless and the prospect of dying without having their name living on after they were gone. God offered them a life. The only option they had was to head out and learn to trust him. That is the big story here. God is the main character.

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Genesis 12:4-9 (NLT)

⁴ So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵ He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan.

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When they arrived in Canaan, ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

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⁸ After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the Lord, and he worshiped the Lord. ⁹ Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

In the next few chapters we see Abraham's faith being tested several times. His life was not easy. He didn't always choose obedience. Many times he did stupid things that showed his lack of trust in what God had promised them. He lied to the King of Egypt, saying that Sarah was his sister, for fear that he would be killed because of Sarah's beauty. He proved himself to be a pretty bad husband. Can you imagine how that would have broken trust between him and Sarah? Pharaoh's officials notice how beautiful Sarah is and comment on her beauty to Abraham in front of Sarah and Abe says, "Who her? She's just my sister. Yeah, go ahead and take her." Big fail, Abe!

Abraham's journey to maturity was not a straight line. He had ups and downs just like we do. How many of you have made mistakes in your past that you regret? I certainly have. Satan would have us live in regret and shame. He wants to paralyze us. Jesus died for our shame and wants to free us. We don't have to live in shame. We can give it all to Jesus. He wants to use those very things that cause us the most shame to build our faith muscles and give him glory.

Abraham was no different than we are.

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His whole life was about building his faith muscles. His life was about learning to trust in God's promise.

God promised Abraham and Sarah that he was going to use them to be a blessing to the nations. He promised them that their descendants would be too numerous to count. God promised he would give them a life. So, Abe and Sarah set out with their nephew, Lot, their servants and all their livestock, not knowing where they were going, only that the Lord had told them to go.

Can you imagine what that must have been like for them? I would think that many times they would have complained to each other that they did not sign up for this life. At seventy-five years old, Abraham gets the call from God to go to some undisclosed land where God promised he would make them a great nation. They have no kids – and it is medically impossible at their age to have kids. Sarah is old enough to collect old age security. And God offers them a future. They believe him and head out into the unknown. That is trusting and cooperating.

It's easy to look at these few chapters and get to the end and see how Abraham became this great man of faith and miss the pain and the emotional turmoil they went through to get there. It was twenty five years from the promise they received from God, in Genesis 12, to the time Isaac was born. That whole time must have been intense for them. There would have been many sleepless nights wondering if God had forgotten them. They would have been tempted to give up.

We certainly know that, on more than one occasion, they took matters into their own hands thinking that God was not going to follow through on his promise. I imagine it would have been extremely emotionally tough on both of them.

We know from the rest of the story, which we will take a look at next week, that God was good for his promise. He always is. God promised that he would make Abraham into a great nation. He kept that promise. Today there are over fourteen million Jews in the world. That's a pretty big family. And if it weren't for the holocaust, where over six million Jews were killed by the Nazis, the number would likely be many times that.

What's going on in your life right now that you are struggling with? Is your faith being tested? Are you tempted to give up? Is Satan trying to cause you to live in shame? You don't need to believe his lies.

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He is the father of lies. He is the accuser of the brethren. He is a lion looking for people to devour. He wants to suck the life out of you. Jesus came to give you life - lots of it.

In closing I want to read a passage of Scripture over you. I want you to take this in as God's promise to you that he will never break.

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Romans 8:28-39 (NLT)

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

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³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. ³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

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³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. ³⁵ Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

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³⁶ (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. ³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.

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³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is a promise of God. We need to cling to this and continually go back to it when we are going through tough times. This is what is true. Satan would have you believe that it's not. But, he is a liar.



Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
The Promise
Genesis 12-17

Week of September 17, 2017

Objective of this study: To understand from your heart that God is up to something bigger than our individual story and that we can trust him with all our lives and cooperate with him.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 - 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Romans 8:28-39** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything jump out at you?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

What's the scariest thing you've ever done?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word/Work (45-60 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Genesis 12:1-9; Genesis 15; Genesis 17:1-8
3. What jumps out at you in this narrative? Is anything surprising?
4. Describe what some of Abe and Sarah's emotions would have been like through their journey so far.
5. Describe how this narrative is a part of God's great rescue plan.
6. **Sermon Quote:** "We need to understand these three threads if we are going to live the satisfying lives we were created for."
 - God is all about restoring his *shalom* to creation
 - Satan is all about destroying God's *shalom*
 - We most naturally move away from God"
7. Why is it important to understand these three threads?
8. Do you see this at play in your own life? If so, how?

Sermon Quote: “The number one lesson for us, as followers of Jesus, is to learn to trust him and cooperate with him in everything.

What is going on in your life right now that is difficult? What are you tempted to worry about? That is the very thing God wants to use to teach you to trust him.

What is the thing in your history that causes you the most shame? That is the very thing God will use for your good and his glory if you let him. Satan would have us believe that we have to stay in hiding and that we are beyond help. That’s a lie. What God wants to do, as we walk with Jesus, is to teach us that he is trustworthy in everything. He wants to call us out of the darkness and into the light so we can have fellowship with each other and with him. He wants to get us to the place where we believe from our hearts what his Word says about us in Romans 8:28.”

9. Read Romans 8:28 and discuss the questions in the above sermon quote.

10. Cooperation with God is trust in action. How are you learning to trust and cooperate with God?

11. **Pray for each other.**

12. **Here are some things you can pray about for the church:**

- a. That we would engage in God’s call to reach Campbell River for Jesus.
- b. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
- c. Our missionary of the month: Gene & Grace Fox - check them out on our website and on the big chalkboard in the foyer
- d. Our missionary of the week: Sandy Ewan in South Sudan - check her out on our website as well.
- e. Christian Life Fellowship - that God would use them to reach people for Jesus in Campbell River.

13. This year as God leads us forward, we want to **Connect - Engage - Grow**. To get started, would you commit to **Connecting** with newcomers, by introducing yourselves to at least one person you don’t know yet, each Sunday morning. Don’t worry if you don’t know who is a newcomer. Start by introducing yourself. Discuss in your group how you could do this.