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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
The Promise Fulfilled
Genesis 17-22
September 24, 2017, Jeff Germo

For those of you who are just tuning in to what we are doing at CRBC, we have just begun a new sermon series called, *Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God is*. We are taking a bird's-eye view of Scripture and looking at some of the major themes in the Bible, from beginning to end, so we can see what God is up to and how we fit into his story.

We began at the first book of the Bible, Genesis, at the beginning of time, where we saw that God created the heavens and the earth, including the first man and first woman. He put them in the Garden of Eden where they lived in perfect harmony. God's peace was very evident.

It was short-lived, however. They believed the lie of Satan that they could find satisfaction and reach their full potential outside of God. From there things spiralled downward uncontrollably.

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We took a look at some of the history between creation and the call of Abraham and we saw very clearly that there have been three threads running through Scripture and through history ever since the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden.

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1. **God is up to something.** He is actively working at bringing back the *shalom* that was lost at The Fall in order to restore relationships with each other and with him.
 2. **Satan is actively working at destroying God's *shalom*.** He is all about destroying relationships. He is actively working at disrupting unity in the church so the name of Jesus will be discredited. And if that isn't enough working against us,
 3. **Left to our own devices, without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we naturally move away from God.** We are our own worst enemy at times.

With even a cursory look at biblical and extra-biblical history you can clearly see these three threads: God is at work; Satan is working against him; and we most naturally believe that freedom means breaking free of God. As Christians, we wouldn't say that, but it is how we live much of the time. That is why the world is going crazy. Read the headlines on any given day. It's so evident. Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. We are somewhere in the middle of God's amazing story where the conclusion of the matter will be — he wins. Stay tuned. God is not done!

We saw last week that a key step in God's plan to restore his peace to all creation was the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. Abe was 75 years old and his young bride, Sarah was 65. They had no children. Sarah was unable to conceive and they were now far past childbearing age. God called Abraham, or Abram, as he was called then, out of a pagan, idol worshipping family and told him that he was going to make him into a great nation. Believing this was the only possible option for them to have a future, they packed up all their belongings and headed out to some undisclosed land that God promised he would give them.

Their life journey was fraught with all kind of roadblocks, dangers, temptations, and lots of drama. If you think you have lots of drama in your family, read their story. It will greatly encourage you. They did not always do things right, and failure was a normal part of their story.

One of the events that happened in the narrative, that we didn't look at last week, was when Sarah and Abraham decided to take matters into their own hands. It had been about ten years since God promised Abraham and Sarah that he was going to make them into a great nation.

After ten years of waiting, they, naturally, began to doubt that God was going to follow through on his promise. Abraham was about 85 years old and Sarah was ten years younger. They decided, in their human "wisdom", that if the dream was going to be realized, they were going to have to make it happen. God had obviously forgotten. So, Sarah, in a moment of desperation told Abraham to go and have sex with her maid-servant, Hagar, so they could start a family through her. That was a normal thing to do back in the ancient world of Mesopotamia for women who could not conceive. The servant was their property. If she had a child, the child, in turn, would be their property.

Abraham, agreed to give it a go. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael. This was not God's plan. God had told them what his plan was. He said the miracle child would be from Sarah. That was his plan.

About fourteen years later, Yahweh showed up again to Abraham and had another conversation with him in which he reaffirmed his promise.

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Genesis 17:1–8 (NLT)

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. ² I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."

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³ At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, ⁴ "This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! ⁵ What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!"

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⁷ "I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God."

God then told Abraham that he was to circumcise all the males older than eight days old. This would be a sign of the covenant between them and God. He also told them that he was changing their names. Abram, from that point on would be Abraham, and Sarai would be called Sarah. He reaffirmed his promise that he would give Sarah, herself, in her old age, a son and she would become the mother of many nations.

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Genesis 17:17–19 (NLT)

17 Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. “How could I become a father at the age of 100?” he thought. “And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?” 18 So Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael live under your special blessing!”

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19 But God replied, “No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant.

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20 As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year.”

Again, there is a whole bunch of drama that happens in the following chapters. Make sure you read Genesis and get all the back story as we go through this series. There are some pretty engaging subplots in this narrative. There is no way we can cover everything, but we do want to make sure to cover the main themes so we can connect the dots and see what God was up to back then, and consequently, what he is up to now, in Campbell River.

Let's fast-forward all the way to chapter 21 to the fulfilment of the promise.

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Genesis 21:1–7 (NLT)

1 The Lord kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. 2 She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. 3 And Abraham named their son Isaac.

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4 Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. 5 Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. 6 And Sarah declared, “God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. 7 Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!”

I can't imagine being excited about having a child at ninety or one hundred years old. This was obviously supremely important to Abraham and Sarah. Finally, after years of living in shame and then stepping out in faith, and twenty-five years of wondering, and doubting, and waiting, the promise was fulfilled. They finally had their miracle child.

Who's the main character in this narrative? It's not Abraham. It's not Sarah. It's not the promised miracle child, Isaac. God is the hero.

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He is always the protagonist. Every time Abraham and Sarah forgot that God was the main character things went bad. They took matters into their own hands and made a mess out of things. Their ego, or fear, or selfishness got in the way of what God wanted to do.

It's no different with you and me. When we forget who the main character in our story is, we try to take the reins from God and chart our own course. We think we can write a better story. What we try to do is take away the hard stuff. We try to write God out of the story. We think freedom means breaking free of God.

Abraham and Sarah came up against a road block in God's vision for them. Several times, they took matters into their own hands and began to write their own story in which they wouldn't need God. They wanted a story without hills and valleys and obstacles, and discomfort. *Their* story didn't require faith.

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Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

⁶ And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Why is it impossible to please God without faith? Because without faith, we don't need God, or so we think. We can live good lives in the realm of what is humanly possible and think we don't need God. If we do that, we will stay inside the comfortable safe place we have constructed for ourselves and remain immature and self-centred, thinking that life revolves around us. We think we are the main characters in our stories and in everyone else's story. The consequence is that we miss relationship both with God and with others. God has something higher for us.

Ruth and I were walking in the Beaver Lodge Lands last week and we were passed by a runner who was wearing a t-shirt that read, in big bold all-caps letters,

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"FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION." We hear that kind of hyper macho mantra all the time. It sounds great, but the problem is it's not true. Failure is not only an option, it is guaranteed that we will fail many times if we are living our lives to the fullest.

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Failure is always a possibility if we are stepping outside our comfort zones where faith is required. People who are growing fail often, but they fail a little better each time. They fail forward. That's how you build your faith muscles.

YOU WILL FAIL. And that's okay. That's life. We cannot live our lives trying to avoid failure.

If you try to live your life with the "FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION" mantra as your driving force, you are going to continually disappoint yourself and live in a fantasy world that is not possible. It's a delusion. When we walk in faith with God, failure is one of the options in our journey. We are not God. We are fallible. We are finite. We have limitations. We are broken. We still have our sinful human nature to battle.

We need to know that if we step out in faith and obedience, there is a very big chance that we will fail along the way, simply because we are not where we should be in our journey to maturity. **There will always be a learning curve if we are growing.** It's through the growth process of failing and getting back up and learning, that our faith muscles are built. God is big enough to turn our failures into something beautiful for our good and his glory.

If we live our lives according to the “FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION” mantra we will do everything possible to make sure we don’t fail. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. However, there is a healthy way of risk management and there is an unhealthy way. The unhealthy way is to make sure we only attempt things that we know for sure we can do with the resources we currently have. One of the problems with living like this is that we will never grow. If we only do what we know we can already accomplish we will stay the same, never challenging ourselves, never stepping out.

The other problem with this kind of thinking is that we don’t need God. We will limit ourselves to just what we can do without God. That is not a life of faith. We can do this as individuals as well as corporately, as a church. As a church, if when we are visioning for the future, we simply look at our current giving and our current human resource pool, we will budget God out of the picture. Who’s going to get the glory then when we succeed in that case? We will. It’s *our* ingenuity, *our* resources, *our* giftings etc. Our vision and ideas will, consequently, be small and we will be the heroes of our story.

Conversely, if we prayerfully seek the wisdom of God and he tells us that he wants us to make sure that everyone in Campbell River has a chance to meet Jesus, that is a big fat hairy audacious God-vision. There is no way we can do that with the resources we have.

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Do you think this is God’s vision for us? I can guarantee you it is. We are here in Campbell River for that very purpose. God’s vision for us is that he would use us to be conduits through which his grace and love would flow freely so every person in Campbell River would have a chance to meet Jesus.

So, what does that mean? It means that we cannot do it on our own. We cannot do it without trusting in God and his resources. And we cannot do it without cooperating with the other churches in Campbell River. We do not need to be the heroes. Remember who the main character in Abraham’s story was? It was God. It’s the same with our story. God is the hero. I am not the hero. Campbell River Baptist Church is not the hero of Campbell River. Jesus is.

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Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)

² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

This is what we know for sure. Jesus is the champion. He is the victor. He is the protagonist in our stories. We need to make sure we always keep him as the main character and fight the temptation to take his role.

The story of Abraham and Sarah does not end where we left off.

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If we just take a look at Abraham’s story without seeing where it fits into God’s bigger story it will remain simply a nice heartwarming story that inspires our hearts to greater heights. It is something much bigger than that. The narrative got even crazier and demanded more faith from Abraham than he ever could have imagined. Let’s fast-forward again to Genesis 22.

We have no idea how many years later this was. There are many different speculations. I think, Isaac was likely in his early teens at that time, but we don't know.

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Genesis 22:1–2 (NLT)

¹ Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." ***² "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."***

Put yourself in Abraham and Sarah's shoes. "What do you mean, take my son, my only son, Isaac, whom I love and sacrifice him? You promised him to us. He's ours now. We waited for years for this promise. He's our miracle child and now you want to take him away from us?" He actually didn't say any of that, as far as we know.

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Genesis 22:3-14 (NLT)

³ The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about.

He just got up and went. No questions asked. He's come a long way since the early days when he would always take the easy way. We have no idea if Sarah knew what was going on. We know that Isaac didn't have a clue what the purpose of their excursion was. I can imagine Abraham getting ready to go with Isaac and heading out the door and Sarah saying, "Where are you going, dear?" "Umm, just for a little walk, sweetie."

What must Abraham have been going through emotionally at that time? His thoughts must have been reeling.

Here's what the writer of Hebrews says about Abraham:

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Hebrews 11:17–19 (NLT)

¹⁷ It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, ¹⁸ even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted."

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¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah. Their whole life journey was an arena in which to practice trusting in that promise. The final test proved not only that Abraham's faith had grown to place where he could surrender everything to God, even if it didn't make sense, but, more importantly, that God is always good for his promises.

Let's read the rest of the story.

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4 On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 “Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.”

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6 So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, 7 Isaac turned to Abraham and said, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “We have the fire and the wood,” the boy said, “but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

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8 “God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both walked on together. 9 When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

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10 And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. 11 At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!” 12 “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”

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13 Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14 Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the Lord will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

What an amazing story of God’s faithfulness! He is the great provider. He is always good for his promises - always. That is a great thing to learn from this story. But it’s not the main point. That is just part of the back story of God’s bigger story. He is up to something. The story of Abraham and Sarah is part of God’s story in how he is bringing his *shalom* back to our relationships, with him and with each other.

This final test of Abraham’s faith, to take his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved and sacrifice him to God, is a picture of what God did for us when he sent his only Son, whom he loved dearly and gave him as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins so we could have *shalom* with him. Isn’t that beautiful?

But that’s not even the whole story. Not only does the story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice Isaac point forward to Christ’s sacrifice for us, but it was through the seed of Isaac that the Messiah came. If Isaac had not lived to carry on his name, God’s great rescue mission would have failed. He wasn’t going to let that happen. There was a bigger picture than each of the isolated events in this story.

The same is true of your story. There is a bigger picture than what is happening in your life right now.

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If you inserted yourself into Abraham and Sarah’s story while they were in the middle of their confusing journey, what would you want to say to them, knowing what you know right now about the bigger story?

The same things we would say to them are what we can say to ourselves in the middle of what we are going through right now. There is a bigger picture. God is doing something. He can make something beautiful out of our messy lives if we let him.

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Romans 15:4 (NLT)

⁴ Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

All the things we just recounted from the narrative of Abraham and Sarah were written down for our encouragement so we won't take matters into our own hands. They are there to give us courage to walk forward in our journey with Jesus. Whatever you are going through right now, you can face knowing that God is bigger than your story.

Knowing the bigger story gives us purpose and meaning. It makes sense of our stories and gives us direction as to how we should invest our lives as we walk with Jesus.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
The Promise Fulfilled
Genesis 17-22***

Week of September 24, 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 **Hebrews 12:1-3** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

What is your favourite novel, story, or movie of all time? What is it about the plot line that draws you in?

[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 17:1-8; 17:17-19; Genesis 21:1-7; Genesis 22:1-14
3. Review the plot line from Genesis 12 - 22 describing the major events and Abe and Sarah's responses to them.
4. How does God help Abe and Sarah see the bigger picture through the events in their lives?
5. How does the narrative in Genesis 22:1-14 point forward to Jesus?
6. Read Genesis 12:1-3. Knowing what we know now about how Jesus fits into the Abrahamic narrative, how would God's promise to Abraham, that he would make him a blessing to the nations, be fulfilled?
7. If you inserted yourself into Abraham and Sarah's story while they were in the middle of their confusing journey, what would you want to say to them, knowing what you know right now about the bigger story?
8. What is going on in your life right now where you would like to know the bigger story so you could make sense of things? In light of question 7, what could you say to yourself to gain perspective and encouragement?
9. What is one verse from today that you would like to take with you into the coming week?
10. **Pray for each other.**
11. **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 Young Adults ministry led by Derek and Jenn Bird
- d. **Our missionary of the month:** Gene & Grace Fox - check them out on our website and on the big chalkboard in the foyer
- e. **Our missionary of the week:** Rod and Donna Black - Rod had plans for some mission work in the Philippines and Pakistan, but had to cancel because of emergency eye surgery. Pray for healing.
- f. **Local CR church:** Church of the Way (Pastors Rick and Brenda Shuttleworth) - that God would use them to reach people for Jesus in Campbell River.

12. 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.