

This is where many of us live: trying to balance our desire to control outcomes and putting our faith in God's call on our lives. A couple steps into marriage without knowing what lies ahead. A graduate steps into a job market that feels like shifting sand. A middle-aged child steps into a caregiving role for a sick parent with no clear end in sight. A church steps into ministry in a neighborhood where the needs outweigh the resources. Faith challenges us to go and do, to act without any guarantees, trusting in the One who makes the promise to be with us.

Faith is a trip without GPS! Faith rarely comes with map coordinates. Faith is walking forward in confident obedience, even when the next step feels shaky. The writer of Hebrews sums it up perfectly saying that faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Later in Genesis 12, Abraham is cited as an example that such assurance is not passive. Faith is a willingness to take the next step, even when the landscape ahead is shrouded in fog. Faith is trusting God's voice more than our own need for clarity and discovering that God is faithful, even when the details are not yet revealed.

When Abraham heard the words, "I will bless you," he might have thought of wealth, land, or children. But God adds a clause that stretches beyond Abraham's imagination: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). God's blessing was never meant to stop with Abraham; it was meant to overflow, to cascade outward, to keep on blessing. God's call is disruptive, requiring Abraham to leave what is familiar and surrender what feels safe; but it is also generative as Abraham is blessed so that others may be blessed.

"Blessed to be a blessing" is at the heart of our own vocation as disciples. What God gives us is not for hoarding but for sharing. The gifts, opportunities, and resources from God are meant to be offered to others. We are blessed not for self-indulgence but for generosity. The promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, through whom God ultimately blesses all nations with new and eternal life. The church carries that blessing outward into the world. We are heirs of Abraham's call, blessed to be a blessing.

As Abraham obeys, he doesn't just walk, he marks the journey. At Shechem, Bethel, and other stopping points, Abraham builds altars (Genesis 12:7-8). These are not random piles of stones, but markers: visible testimonies that here, in this place, God met Abraham. These altars signified territorial claims; with these altars Abraham declared, "This place

belongs to the Lord who has met me here, and it will belong to my descendants." These altars were also tangible and immediate expression of worship, faith, and obedience.

In his beloved hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," Robert Robinson writes: *Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come; and I hope, by Thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.* The term "Ebenezer" is a reference to 1 Samuel 7, which tells the story of Israel's defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The defeated Israelites lost the Ark of the Covenant, and after a period of national repentance and prayer led by the prophet Samuel, the Israelites again fought the Philistines. This time, God intervened with thunder, throwing the Philistines into confusion, and the Israelites won a decisive victory. The prophet Samuel rejoiced and set up a large stone, calling it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). The word Ebenezer is a transliteration of two Hebrew words: "*eben*" meaning stone and "*ezer*" meaning help. Ebenezer literally means "stone of help."

When we are blessed to experience a God-thing and feel the outrageous good fortune of God in our lives, it is not uncommon to celebrate, tell others what happened, and acknowledge our indebtedness to God. Our ancestors in the faith set up monuments, altars, ebenezers as reminders of the faithfulness of God. Such reminders help us mark those specific moments where God intervened, protected us, or delivered on a promise.

We need those reminders because balancing faith and guaranteeing outcomes is tricky work. Paul, writing to the Romans, likens this to balancing faith and the law. If we rely on the law, hoping to guarantee the outcomes, Paul says "faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath" (Romans 4:14-15). Since God's dealings with Abraham happened before the giving of the Mosaic Law, they were not based on the law but rather based on God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness through faith. The law cannot bring us into the blessings of God's promises, not because the law is bad, but because we are unable to keep the law. Our inability to keep the law, our transgression, means the law becomes a vehicle of God's wrath towards us, especially if we regard it as the principle by which we are justified before God.

But Paul says our justification before God comes through grace. Faith is related to grace in the same way *works* are related to *law*. Grace and law are principles, and faith and works are how we pursue those principles for our relationship with God. We are not saved by *faith*; we are saved by God's *grace*; and *grace* is appropriated by our *faith* in Christ's atoning work for us at the cross. The promise can only be sure if it is according to grace. If law is the basis of our salvation, then our salvation depends on our performance in keeping the law, and no one can keep the law well enough to be saved by it. A law-promise of salvation

is never be guaranteed. But if our relationship with God is according to grace, then the promise is for those who are of the *faith* of Abraham.

Walking by faith is a sure mark of righteousness. When Habakkuk stood trembling before a future he could not control, God spoke a simple, world-shaping truth: “The righteous live by their faithfulness” (Habakkuk 2:4). Paul picks up that theme, saying that righteousness isn’t built on our achievements but revealed “through faith for faith,” a life that begins, continues, and ends by trusting God (Romans 1:17). Paul hits the theme again when he identifies Abraham as the living illustration of faith (Romans 4). Abraham believed God, walked with God, and that trust was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). The apostle James adds that Abraham’s faith was not theoretical: his faith showed up in real obedience, real steps, real choices, and real actions. Faith was “active along with his works, and by works faith was brought to completion” (James 2:22).

Righteousness is not perfect certainty or flawless theology. Righteousness is a life that “keeps the faith” as best it can, with heart and mind focused on the One who promises and is faithful. Righteousness is faith in motion. Righteousness is Abraham leaving Haran for an unknown land. Righteousness is Habakkuk watching from the ramparts. Righteousness is Paul proclaiming a gospel built on faith rather than works. Righteousness is James insisting that genuine faith is always active. Mix all this together and you get an amazing result: Abraham was called a “friend of God” (James 2:23).

Genesis 12 does not end with Abraham achieving stability or certainty; it ends with Abraham on the move, walking, pitching tents, building altars, and taking the next step. His life is a picture of faith, of pilgrimage, of being blessed to be a blessing, of being sustained by faith in God’s promises. So it is with us. God still calls people to leave, to go, to step out. Sometimes it’s geographical. Sometimes it’s vocational. Sometimes it’s a call to forgiveness, reconciliation, or generosity. But it’s always a call away from self-sufficiency in ourselves and toward trust in God who is faithful. We may not know the way forward, but we trust the One who says, “Go...to the land that I will show you.” That’s enough.

Prayer: Faithful God, how I praise Your name for You have made me a new creation in Christ and credited me with righteousness by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You that although I was dead in my sin, You breathed Your new life in Christ into me and made me Your child forever and ever. Thank You, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Sources:

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Our God Positioning System

Sunday, June 7, 2026

Genesis 12:1-9

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

No one expected Shayne and Shelly Peterson to do anything radical. They’d spent years building a life in Arizona: business, home, raising four daughters. Now empty nesters with nine grandkids and lifelong friends, Shayne and Shelly attended birthday parties, soccer games, and dance recitals. They enjoyed “Sunday dinners, messy art projects, and bedtime giggles when babysitting the grandkids.” Why would Shayne and Shelly give up this settled lifestyle and sell all their possessions in exchange for “two suitcases, a backpack, one-way tickets to Bali, and a dream [they] couldn’t fully explain”? As they prepared to leave their house for the last time, Shelly reflected, “I didn’t feel bold. I felt terrified.”

Abraham likely felt the same way. Genesis 12 opens with words that changed human history: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:1-2). Abraham and his wife Sarah lived comfortably in Haran. Abraham was 75 and Sarah was about 10 years younger. A journey of this magnitude to an unknown place, among unknown people, facing unknown hazards would be daunting, especially when you notice what’s missing: Abraham and Sarah had no map, no GPS, no compass. No plan, only a promise: “Go...to the land I will show you.”

This is a call to radical trust, where faith means moving forward without certainty and no safety net. Abraham must leave the security of homeland, family, and identity, and step into the unknown. In the ancient world, you did not leave your family’s land; it was your future. You did not step away from your clan; it was your safety net. Yet Abraham leaves it all with only a prayer and a promise. But this was no small promise! “I will bless you...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” says God (Genesis 12:2-3). Abraham likely thought first of survival and a personal future; but God was thinking of generations, of nations, and of centuries. God’s call was not just to bless Abraham, but to make Abraham the conduit for God to bless the whole world.

God’s call often collides with our craving for certainty. We live in an age of GPS, five-year plans, insurance policies, and security measures. We are trained to minimize risk and to seek guarantees before we take steps. But God gives Abraham no such security; the only coordinates Abraham receives are *relational*: “Go to the land that I will show you.” The “map” is not a diagram but a promise, and the journey is based on faith, the radical trust in the One who makes the promise.