



Theme: B.L.E.S.S.- Loving Others to Change the World **“BLESSED to be a BLESSing”**

Weekly Memory Verse:

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 ...All the families on earth will be blessed through you.

– Genesis 12:2 and 3b

*For this series of sermons, we invite you to read the book, **B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Practices to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World** by Dave and Jon Ferguson. We encourage you to pick up a copy, or download one, and **read chapter 2 this week**. The readings below will complement this chapter, focusing on the idea of friendship.*

Monday, September 26 – Read Genesis 11:27 to 12:7. The Genesis story mentioned Abram’s wife Sarai prominently right from the first, a rarity in that patriarchal age. God’s solemn covenant pledge immediately introduced a note of tension that involved Abram’s wife. God told Abram, “I give this land to your descendants,” an odd promise given that, so far, “Sarai was unable to have children.”

🔥 Ur and Haran were two well-established cities in the world of Abram’s time. What we today call the Promised Land, on the other hand, was a sort of “Wild West” region, holding smaller cities and nomadic tribes. In what ways has God called you to move beyond places (internal or external) where you are comfortable on your faith journey?

🔥 If God gave you the assignment to find a couple to start a great nation, would you be likely to choose an older, childless couple? In a pattern that grows familiar as we read the Bible, God chose Abram and Sarai instead of a young family who already had six healthy children and made promises to their (non-existent) descendants. What makes you an unlikely candidate for God to use? Are you willing to be open to God’s call, even if it calls on that unlikely aspect of who you are?

Prayer: *O Lord, I think of you calling Abram and Sarai. I ask you to help me see myself as you see me. That you love me and see value in me, even my “unlikely parts.” Give me ears to hear your call, and a responsive heart. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 27 – Read Genesis 12:10-20. Abram, a man of his time, saw his own survival as the only essential to carrying out God’s promises. Apparently, he saw Sarai as expendable, though only if that were truly necessary. Genesis 20:1-17 recorded that they (there is no record that Sarai protested this deception) made this error twice. God’s outlook was bigger than their cultural view which elevated men over women. God saw Sarai as just as important to the covenant as Abram and shielded her from harm.

☛ Pastor D. Stuart Briscoe noted that at the end of this episode, “The purposes of God were intact even though the reputation of Abram was decidedly tattered.” Does it lower your opinion of God that he was willing to work with limited, fallible humans, or does it give you hope that God’s loving purpose can also work steadfastly in your life, even when you fail?

☛ The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary said, “At present we remain ignorant of what sociological realities commended this course of action to Abram. The Israelite audience no doubt knew what advantage was to be gained from the ruse, so there was no need for the author to explain.” Has an action ever puzzled you because you didn’t know what led the person to make the choice? What unwritten family or social rules lead you to act in ways that might puzzle a person ignorant of those rules?

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. You are patient with me even when I am not sure I understand my own actions. Keep me faithful to you through life’s ups and downs. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 28 – Read Genesis 16:1-15. Sarai must have thought that she’d been plenty patient. It had been over ten years since God promised to make a great nation of the family she and Abram did not yet have! Other well-off women had maidservants bear children for them when they couldn’t. Sarai thought that might help God’s plan happen—but things didn’t work out well. Sarai tried to put Hagar and her son “in their place,” leading Hagar to run away. But God cared about and saved those two lives.

☛ Archeologists have found marriage contracts from ancient Nuzi and Assyria that called for the same kind of child-bearing plan Sarai used in this story. Have you ever chosen a certain course of action because “everybody’s doing it”? What strengths and what flaws lie in that kind of thinking as a guide for your life? What ways of understanding God’s desires for you are more reliable than looking at what “everyone else” is doing?

☛ Childlessness is tough today for many couples, and it was Sarai’s day as well. To the ancients, the survival of the family line was the highest value, and producing a male heir outweighed all else. Can you empathize with Sarai’s frustration when God’s promise did not appear to be coming true? When have you had to wait in hope, trust and perhaps frustration to see if God will act in your life?

Prayer: *Lord God, you are faithful—though sometimes you seem so slow! Build my trust and my patience, that I may be okay with living a life governed by your timing, not mine. Amen.*

Thursday, September 29 – Read Genesis 17:15-22. In Hebrew (and most Middle Eastern) culture, names mattered. Names carried meaning. So, at a pivotal moment, God renamed Abram Abraham, “father of a multitude” in Genesis 17:5. Sarai was renamed Sarah, generally thought to mean “princess”. God repeated the promise that Sarah would have a son herself. With great honesty, Genesis reported that both aged “parents,” perhaps understandably, laughed not just once but twice, in Genesis 17:17 and 18:12!

☛ When Abraham plaintively said to God, “If only you would accept Ishmael,” God’s reply again made it clear that Sarah was an integral part of the covenant. God would bless

Ishmael and give him many descendants, too—but the covenant line would run through Sarah’s boy. What messages was God sending through this exchange with Abraham about the value of women and the worth of the marriage commitment? What was God saying about those outside the line of Abraham, such as those who might reject faith today?

What does your name mean? Do you know why your parents chose that name for you? Do you like your name? How has your name shaped your view of yourself and of your place in the world, positively or negatively? If God were to choose a new name for you, as is mentioned in Revelation 2:17 and 3:12, what personal significance would you hope that name would carry?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I marvel at the way you honored Abraham and Sarah’s freedom, and yet persistently moved them into your purposes. Please be the guiding force in my life today. Amen.

Friday, September 30 – Read Genesis 21:1-7. Just as God had promised, Sarah did bear Abraham a son in their old age. They named the boy Isaac, which in Hebrew means “laughter” or “he laughs”. Through God’s persistence and faithfulness, as much as Abraham and Sarah’s, the sweeping story of God’s covenant with his people Israel was underway. In Isaac, Sarah’s story found a truly joyous ending.

Genesis 21:1 said, “The Lord was attentive to Sarah just as he had said, and the Lord carried out just what he had promised her.” Do you trust that, in the long run, you can depend on God to be attentive to you, and to carry out just what God has promised you, too? How can your attention to small experiences of God’s faithfulness help to build your trust for the larger promises that may require more waiting and patience?

Can you sense the joyous wonder in Sarah’s words: “Who could have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse sons? But now I’ve given birth to a son when he was old!” (verse 7)? When have you, or someone you’ve known, sensed that, perhaps beyond all human logic, God has made something wonderful possible in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, a chain of unexpected births began with Isaac—and it ended with your birth in Bethlehem to be my Savior. Let the wonder of every child remind me of your steady, quiet work of bringing new life into our world. Amen.

Saturday, October 1 – Read Hebrews 11:8-12. In chapter 11, the letter to the Hebrews listed great heroes of faith. As all Hebrews would expect, the list included Abraham, the grand patriarch who was, literally, Israel’s founding father. But, accurately echoing the Genesis story, Sarah was on the list too. She was Abraham’s partner through the long journey from promise to fulfillment; she bore the son God had promised, setting in motion the family line that led to Jesus.

Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary that, in Hebrews 11, “‘Faith’ is not a general religious attitude to life. It’s not simply believing difficult or impossible things for the sake of it, as though simple credulity was itself a virtue. The faith in question ... is the faith which hears and believes the promise of God, the assured word from the world’s creator that he is also the world’s redeemer ... It isn’t just that Abraham and Sarah thought they heard a strange being speaking to them and decided to believe it, but rather that the God they came to know was the creator God, the absolutely trustworthy one, the one who could give life where there was none, in verses 11 and 12.” What life experiences have led you to know God, the absolutely trustworthy one, better? How can you continue to deepen that relationship, and to find the joy and freedom it offers you?

What will it take for you to have faith to BLESS others in the days ahead, trusting that God will be faithful and work through you to bless those around you?

Prayer: *Lord God, we sometimes sing “I want to know you, I want to hear your voice, I want to know you more.” Through your word, through your people, and in quiet times I spend seeking you, keep revealing yourself to me. Amen.*