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Sermon: Abram's Posture

Genesis 12:1-9

### **Sermon: Abram's Posture**

Today, we meet Abram at the moment that turns an ordinary life into a blessing for the world. The line that begins it all is simple: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (Gen 12:1, NRSVUE). From that simple line, history bends. But if we look beyond the journey, the tents, the altars and the promises we can see something deeper: Abram kept his soul turned God-ward, his spirit, and that posture opened him to hear and to go.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It tells "beginnings": the creation and fall (Gen 1-3), the spread of sin and God's preserving grace (4-11) and the start of God's covenant through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (12-50). Its purpose is to reveal who God is—the Creator and covenant-maker—and to show how God begins a rescue plan for the world by choosing a family to bless "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3). In short: Genesis is origins, covenant and promise—setting the stage for the rest of Scripture.

Genesis 12:1-9 is a hinge in Scripture—the moment the story narrows from the scattered nations of Genesis 1-11 to one ordinary couple through whom God intends to bless the world. When I call Genesis 12:1-9 a "hinge," I mean it's the pivot where the Bible's wide-angle lens on humanity (creation, fall, flood, Babel) clicks to a tight focus on one family through whom God will address the world's brokenness. After the scattering at Babel ("the Lord scattered them abroad," Gen 11:9), God does not abandon the nations—he chooses a starting point. The narrative narrows to Abram and Sarai not because they are impressive but because God's mission now takes a covenant or agreement shape: a great nation, land and a line of blessing aimed outward ("in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," Gen 12:3). From this hinge swing the doorways of Israel's story (patriarchs, Exodus, David), the prophetic hope for the nations and the New Testament's claim that Scripture "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham" (Gal 3:8). Literarily, the plot turns; theologically, grace elects a people; missiologically, God's redemptive love gets a concrete address.

### **Background: Abram before the Call**

Before chapter 12, Abram is not a hero; he is a name in a family list, a genealogy. Genesis 11:27-31 mentions him six times, but his deceased brother Haran is actually named seven times and their brother Nahor four. In other words, the text gives no hint of achievements. We get only an inkling that something is brewing when the descendants of Terah—Abram, Nahor and Haran—are singled out (Gen 11:27), but it is still only an inkling.

His father Terah was seventy when he fathered the three boys (Gen 11:26). The family migrated from Ur toward Canaan but stopped and settled in Haran (Gen 11:31). Haran (the person) died earlier in Ur (Gen 11:28), so when Terah moved north, he took Abram and his grandson Lot—

sensible, given Terah's age. By the time we reach Genesis 12, Abram and Sarai are settled in Haran, surrounded by kin and security.

Scripture makes plain that Abram already commanded a substantial household at the moment of calling. When he departs, Genesis notes "the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran" (Gen 12:5). However, there is no reported strife in Haran pushing him out.

So the picture is plain: nothing celebrated, nothing spectacular, already responsible for a sizable household and living with stability. Into that ordinariness, God speaks.

### **The Call: what God says and what Abram does**

Listen to the cadence of Genesis 12:1-3. First comes the call: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Then the promises:

1. A great nation — "I will make of you a great nation" (v. 2).
2. A land — the command points forward to geography God himself will disclose (v. 1), soon named when the Lord says, "To your offspring I will give this land" (v. 7).
3. A blessing that multiplies — "I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing... I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vv. 2-3).

Abram's response is as stark as it is faithful: "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (v. 4). He takes Sarai, Lot, his nephew, who he is responsible for, their gathered possessions and their people and sets out. During his journeys, he does two things we dare not miss: he pitches his tent and he builds altars (vv. 7-8). Tents are for moving; altars are for worship. Abram's life becomes a rhythm of mobility and prayer, journey and worship.

### **Why Abram? God's choice—and the secret of his posture**

Why Abram? The text offers no accomplishments. If anything, it stresses the ordinariness of his beginnings. Jewish traditions later embellished his pre-call life, stories about smashing idols, but Genesis itself keeps him unadorned. That is a grace point: God's choose Abram, not a reward for his achievements but choose Abram as a gift for the world.

And yet Scripture hints at the kind of interior life Abram led. Abram is presented as spiritually responsive, building altars and calling on the name of the Lord (Gen 12:7-8). In other words, he lives with his soul God-facing in spirit. That God-ward posture, spirit, is the quiet secret at the heart of calling.

### **"Calling": meaning**

Biblically, a call is God's initiating something (burning bush, command, vision, a simple nudge to serve, skill-based training, dream, appointments) that directs a person's future. It is not first an

inner mood; it is a divine address. God speaks and a life is redirected. Sometimes the call concerns geography (Abram), sometimes vocation (Moses, Isaiah, the apostles), sometimes holiness (Israel as “a kingdom of priests,” Exod 19:6). Always, the Call has a shape: from something, to something and for someone beyond oneself (“so that you will be a blessing,” Gen 12:2).

A calling is God’s personal summons, whether loud and booming or just seeing a need, that reorients a life—his initiative that invites your obedient “yes” for the good of others. In Scripture, a calling is God’s address before it’s our achievement: God speaks, we respond.

In Scripture, God often calls people before handing them the full map and he frequently works through unnamed, ordinary servants, the widow of Zarephath receives a simple call to feed Elijah (1 Kgs 17:8-16); Abraham’s unnamed servant obeys a humble commission to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24). The pattern is that their posture, their spirit is turned to God and God speaks, they take the next faithful step—and the calling becomes clear as they walk.

Today, a calling from God can be a lifelong vocation (teaching, nursing, trades, pastoring), a seasonal assignment - caring for an aging parent, or the parenting of a teenager, or a one-moment nudge (encouraging a coworker, reconciling with a friend).

How big are callings? Big enough to touch nations (Abram) and small enough to shape a single act of love. The scale is God’s; the posture is ours—keep your spirit God-ward and when He speaks, go. Callings run from the kitchen table conversations to the ends of the earth, but the scale is God’s, not ours.

### **Picking up the phone, reading a text message. How do we receive a call?**

If calling begins with God’s initiative, how do we hear it? By keeping our spirit in a God-ward posture. Practically, that means:

1. Scripture. Allow for God’s word of your day. Let the living and active word “discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). This might be as simple as having your radio tuned to a Christian station that integrates scripture.
2. Altar-building habits. Abram built altars everywhere he went (Gen 12:7-8). For us: a prayer chair, a walking route, a mealtime blessing—place-markers where worship becomes our reflex.
3. Obedience in small things. Abram got called “So Abram went” (Gen 12:4) is not heroic rhetoric; it is one step after another. Do the next faithful thing God has already shown you.
4. Listening with others. Sarai and Lot go too (Gen 12:5). Callings flourishes in households and congregations that discern together.
5. Open-handedness about scale. Your Call may not look “big,” but its fruit is God’s to grow. Our responsibility is to keep our spirits in the correct posture and obedience.

### **Hearing God’s Call in the ‘loops**

Does God still call ordinary people in Kamloops? Yes. Callings here can easily sound like:

- Neighbour-blessing callings: “I will bless you... and you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). Think hospitality to a newcomer on your street, mentoring a teen, or befriending someone isolated. Driving someone to a doctor's appointment. Even waving to the grouchy old guy walking his dog.
- Workplace faithfulness: Conduct business with integrity; treat staff and clients as image-bearers
- Family dynamics: Pray with your children; forgive quickly; care for aging parents; reconcile with a sibling.
- Congregational service: Teach, sing, visit, lead a small group, serve downtown, support the food bank, bring a friend.
- City-ward love: Engage issues of housing, mental health and wildfire resilience with patience and hope. Serve on community boards.

In each case, the posture precedes the project. Keep your spirit God-ward and you will be surprised by the shapes your callings takes.

If you want one sentence to carry into your week, take this: Soul is your inner life as you; spirit is your inner life turned toward God. Keep turning. You don't need a dramatic backstory, a crisis, or a perfect plan. You need a God-facing spirit.

### **Summation**

Some of you wonder, “What if I'm just ordinary?” That's exactly Abram's starting place. Abram turned and kept his spirit God-ward and obeyed and went. The same God calls here, now. The altar building habit you build in your home, the prayer you whisper at Royal Inland Hospital, the integrity you show at work, the forgiveness you extend in a fractured friendship—these are the tents and altars of Kamloops. The Call has a shape: from something, to something and for someone beyond oneself (“so that you will be a blessing,” Gen 12:2). From such ordinary obedience, God still blesses “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3).

So when the nudge comes, do the next faithful step. “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him” (Gen 12:4). May we do likewise. Amen.