

"For God So Loved the World That He Said, 'Psst! Abram. Pack Your Bags!'"

Genesis 12:1-10

28 January 2024

Maybe the way you keep from goin' crazy *is* by writing on your walls? When you think you are about to lose your mind, maybe the way you keep from losing your mind is by writing on your walls? That's what the Reformer Martin Luther did. Gustav K. Wiencke writes about Luther and how he had a habit of writing on the walls of his study. He says:

"Twenty years after Luther had been at the Castle Coburg during the Diet of Augsburg, Mathaeus Ratzeberger, Luther's physician, visited there. He made a point of inspecting the room Luther had used as a study and meticulously noted down the verses which Luther had written on the wall.

One was Ps. 118:17, 'I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord.' To the verse Luther had added musical notes for singing. Other psalm verses were also marked on the wall. It was Luther's custom to write down verses and words where he could have them before his eyes. When the news of his father's death reached him at the Coburg, Luther took his Psalter, went to his room, and was not seen the rest of the day."

Gustav K. Wiencke, "Sayings in Which Luther Found Comfort" in *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, 43:169

Sometimes the way you keep from losing all your marbles is by writing Psalm 118:17 on your walls. I did that on Friday. I copied Luther and wrote on the walls in my man cave. I wrote Psalm 118:17. I was feeling overwhelmed with all that's going on in my life, so I just decided to do what Luther did. Sometimes the way you keep from losing all your marbles is by writing Psalm 118:17 on your walls. To keep from going crazy when your life is crazy you have to-

WALLPAPER YOUR REALITY WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

David Powlison said that. I've shared it before, but I share it again because that's exactly Abram and Co. had to do. And, it's what we have to do. Like Luther, we must wallpaper our life with the promises of God. That's how you make it. That's how you keep from losing your mind when you have a prodigal son/daughter, or get cancer, or your spouse wants to leave you.

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 12. What we'll see today is that God so loved the world that He showed up at Abram's house and said, "Psst! Abram. Pack your bags. We're goin' on a road trip!"

* INSERT ABRAM'S JOURNEY SLIDE

And that's what happened. As we saw last week, Abram and his family left Ur of the Chaldeans on their way to Canaan, but they stopped at Haran. But, then Yahweh showed up one day with a *U-Haul* truck and it was moving day again.

By the way, if you're new to Grace, you need to know that Yahweh is God's covenant name in Hebrew. I say *Yahweh* when referring to God in the Old Testament. In our English Bibles, translators typically translate *Yahweh* as LORD (all caps). So, when you see LORD (all caps) that's the translators letting you know that in Hebrew it's God's name *Yahweh*. So-

LORD = Yahweh

Why they do that, I do not know? I mean, I actually do know. Some people have believed that God's name *Yahweh* was too holy to pronounce, but that's not true. As we'll see in today's passage, Abram called upon the *name* of the Lord, the name of *Yahweh*.

God's name has always been spoken. Yahweh gave us His name to be used and cherished! Let me read something to you by OT scholar Alec Motyer and then we'll jump into the text. He says:

So it was in Genesis 4:26 when people began to call their God by his personal name; so it was, even more, when the significance of that Name was revealed to Moses (Exod. 3:15). A totally false sense of reverence later said 'The Name is too holy for us to use,' and the custom was introduced of representing it as 'The Lord'. No, no. He has granted us the privilege, and we should learn (belatedly) to live in the benefit of it. Hebrew has two main nouns for 'God'. There is the plural Elohim, God in the fullness of the divine attributes – for simplicity I translate this as 'God' – and the singular el, which I translate as "transcendent God". But there is only one 'Name'.

'God' is what he is; Yahweh is who he is.

So, I will be using Yahweh, as I always do. I want the kids of this church to grow up knowing God's name. Okay. Genesis 12.

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Wow! Did you notice that? It's right there in verse 1. Yahweh spoke to Abram! Sometimes I think we forget how wonderfully shocking this is! God speaks to His people. God speaks to us! The last time we see Yahweh speaking in the book of Genesis is the fall of Adam and Eve, then when Cain kills his brother, then with Noah and the flood, and finally the Tower of Babel. And, it's all judgment. It's all God dealing with sin.

But, now He shows up in chapter 12, not to bring judgment, but in *grace*, calling Abram to Himself. Speaking to him. Talking to him. So, God speaks in Genesis 12 and it's nothing but promises and blessings! Sometimes I think we forget how wonderfully shocking this is! God speaks to us.

And, how much more should we be in awe because we have the Bible! Listen, if you want to hear God speak audibly to you, open your Bible and read it out loud. Or, use an app on your phone. God speaks. Never get over that.

So, Yahweh speaks to Abram and tells him to pack his bags and go to the land of Canaan. But, what was Abram doing when God appeared to Him? Well, Joshua 24:2 tells us that Abram and his family were worshipping other gods when they lived in Ur. Abram was just a run-of-the-mill unregenerate pagan when he got saved. He was an idol worshipper. So, we see the sovereignty of God at work here. The Lord appears to Abram, at some point when he's living in Ur, and regenerates him, fills him with the Holy Spirit, makes him alive spiritually so that Abram can follow Yahweh as a disciple, and live a life of glorifying and enjoying God.

Then, at some point after Abram's conversion, Yahweh appears to him and tells him to go to the land of Canaan (see Acts 7:4). The sovereignty of God is all over this passage. It's like glitter- it's everywhere! Listen, if you can leave these 2 paragraphs without getting God's sovereignty all over your fingers, you need to re-read them. God is the one who takes the initiative to save Abram when he was living his best life as a pagan in Ur of the Chaldeans. God calls Abram- as God always calls the elect- to Himself.

You can file that under: *Sovereign grace*.

And, you see the sovereignty of God in all the "I will" statements that Yahweh makes:

"I will show you..." v. 1

"I will make of you..." v. 2

"I will bless you and (I will) make your name great..." v. 2

"I will bless..." v. 3

"I will curse..." v. 3

"I will give this land..." v. 7

7 "I will" promises. Yahweh is doing everything here. I will, I will, I will. Ralph Davis calls these "I will" statements the "Quad Promise."

People [seed]

'I will make you into a great nation' (v. 2)

'To your seed ...' (v. 7)

Protection / Presence

'I will bless your blessers and the one despising you I will curse' (v. 3a)

Programme

'In you all the families of the ground will be blessed' (v. 3b)

Place

'To the land that I will show you' (v. 1)

'To your seed I will give this land' (v. 7)

So, Yahweh promises Abram that he would have people (even though Sarai is barren), and have God's protective presence, and all peoples/nations would be blessed through him, and finally Abram would have land.

Now, you wouldn't think that God calling one man, Abram, would really matter. I mean, is that fact gonna change your Thursday afternoon this week? It should! It matters to your salvation that God called Abram. Your salvation hinges upon that. Why? Because this is the way God would bless the nations of the world! Through Abram and then eventually through His own son, Jesus Christ. We are now co-heirs with Abraham, the man of faith, as Paul says in Galatians:

Galatians 3:7-9

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

And-

Galatians 3:26-29

...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We are heirs according to the promise given to Abraham! We are blessed along with Abraham! This is the Gospel! So, yeah, it will change your Thursday afternoon this week. But, what does Abram do with this "Quad promise" from Yahweh.

LOOK AT VERSE 4...

So Abram went, as Yahweh had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to Yahweh, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to Yahweh and called upon the name of Yahweh. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

I love verse 4: "So Abram went..." He just took God at His word! He just packed his bags and took off. I love that! Now, the first 75 years of Abram's life are unknown. We don't know what his life was like before this. All we know is that he was a pagan living in Ur of the Chaldeans worshipping other gods. But, then Yahweh showed up when Abe was 75 and said, "Psst! Move to a place I tell you to move to." And, Abe did! So Abram went.

And, as Abram is unpacking the *U-haul* in the land of Canaan, Yahweh appears to him a second time and He reiterates the promise in verse 7: "To your offspring I will give this land." Why did Yahweh show up a second time? Why repeat the promise to Abram? Because Yahweh knows that we need assurance. Because God knows that our faith can be weak, like mine was Friday morning. God knows that one minute we can be *Genesis-12:7-So-Abram-went* people and suddenly become *Matthew-8:25-disciples-in-the-boat-crying-out-Save-us-Lord-we-are-perishing* people.

Just like that! From faith to fear. So, God brings us reassurances, through His word, and oftentimes, through other people, like what happened to me on Friday morning. I had a few friends speaking truth to my discombobulated heart. I think Jesus would agree with our big idea today-

WALLPAPER YOUR REALITY WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

That's what I literally did Friday morning. And, that's why Yahweh repeats the promise to Abram here in verse 7- so that His promise will wallpaper Abram's reality. And, what was Abram's reality? Oh, yeah. He was 75 years old! And, his wife Sarai was barren. That's why Yahweh showed up repeating the promise of land and offspring! Because everything in their life said the opposite.

They are old. Sarai is barren. Oh, yeah. There's another reason to repeat the promise to Abram: The Canaanites currently occupy the land that Yahweh promised to him! So, 2 things stand in the way of God's promise: Sarai's barrenness and the Canaanites!

Everything looked impossible. But, Abram and Co. went into the unknown with the promise of God in their back pocket. That's all they had. And, sometimes, that's all you have! But, it's all you need! Bruce Waltke says, "*Christians are people of the ear, not of the eye.*" We walk by faith, not by sight. We hear and believe, not see and believe.

So, Abram shows us how to live by faith because he and Sarai had no idea why God would call them to leave their family in Ur of the Chaldeans, and why his brother would die, and why his father would die on the journey, and

why Sarai could not get pregnant. They had no idea why things were this way. They had no explanations from God. They had to trust Yahweh's heart, when they couldn't trace Yahweh's hand. But, we know now that God was preparing them to bring blessing to the nations of the world. God had a bigger purpose in it all: saving you! Adopting you into His family! Isn't that wonderful? Doesn't that make you want to stand up and sing the Doxology?

Like Abram and Saria, we have to think about what God is preparing us for right now, as we go through trials. We may not understand God's purposes right now, we may not understand His ways, we might not even understand it all until we look back and see what God was doing in our lives. But in between then, we may not understand, but we can believe. We may not have explanations, but we can trust. We may be confused, we may be perplexed, but we can trust His promises, just like Abram.

Understand this: Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where Jesus is preparing us for things in the future. We may not understand *right now* how it's all going to work out, but God has bigger plan for our lives. We simply have to cling to Him, cling to His promises. God is doing things in our lives right now where He is taking us through trials that will enable us to be able to go through the trials we're going to go through in two years, five years, ten years. The things that we are going through right now may be God preparing us for what we will face in the future. Think about that.

So, how do you stay strong in the midst of overwhelming circumstances where you feel like you're in the wilderness, and you don't know what's going on, you don't know what God is up to? Answer: You cling to the promises of God. You cling to the God of the promises. You don't have to understand what God is up to. You don't have to have explanations. You simply find a promise in His word, and you cling to it. You paint your reality with the promise of God. And, the good news of the Gospel is that God is holding us, even when we can't cling to Him! When we are so weak, that all we can do is collapse, we collapse into the everlasting arms. The reality is that we're not so much clinging to God, as we are resting and collapsing into His hands.

So, this promise in Genesis 12, given back in Ur of the Chaldeans, was Abram's Bible. He had no Scripture. No verses. No "nothing is too impossible for God." No "I can do all things through Christ." No Romans 8:28. But, he had this "quad Promise" that he and Sarai could cling to. He could paint the reality of Sarai's barrenness with, "*To your offspring I will give this land.*"

But, notice too what it says in verses 7-8:

So he built there an altar to Yahweh, who had appeared to him. (v.7)

And there he built an altar to Yahweh and called upon the name of Yahweh. (v.8)

In other words, Abram worshipped! In the midst of the confusion, and not being able to explain Sarai's barrenness, he worshipped! I'm sure Abram had questions. I'm sure he wanted explanations. I'm sure he didn't understand. *But, he worshipped.* Think about that the next time you scratch your head and wonder what God is doing in your life. Think about that the next time you desperately crave explanations from God. Simply worship.

So, Abram builds an altar 2 times. It's like he just can't get away from worship. He can't get away from celebrating atonement, and offering sacrifices to Yahweh. And, we can't get away from the fact that Abram likely offered sacrifices for his sins at these altars. So, we can say that at 2 specific times, Abram confesses his sin. Why? Why follow up hearing the promises of God by building altars and offering sacrifices and confessing sin? Why?

Well, I'll let Iain Duguid answer that. He says, "*The purpose of confessing our sins is not to render us miserable by simply reminding us what great sinners we are. It is to remind us of what a great Savior we have.*"

Abram built 2 altars to remind himself and his family what a great Savior Yahweh is. To remind himself that God forgives sinners. That Jesus can't remember our sins. That if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That Yahweh paid it all and all to Him we owe. That though our sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Abram's 2 altars were a reminder to him and to his family- *which now includes us*- to-
WALLPAPER YOUR REALITY WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

So, here's an example of how to do that, how to wallpaper your reality with God's word. Ray and Jani Ortlund endured a very difficult ministry at a church that they pastored before planting Immanuel Church in Nashville, TN. They were so wounded, so hurt that they didn't think they could go on in ministry. And then David Powlison passed on some wisdom and comfort to them. Here's what Ray said about David Powlison shortly after David died in 2019:

Remembering David Powlison moves me deeply. When everything was on the line for Jani and me, David and Nan were there for us.

We spent a day together in 2007— for Jani and me, a catastrophic disaster of a year. David was an oasis of calm, gentleness, and reasonableness amid a swirl of accusations, loss, and heartbreak. David, with Nan, kept our hope alive.

One suggestion David made became so significant that I have passed it along to many others since then. I can't remember his exact words. But it went something like this: "Ray and Jani, you are suffering. And it isn't going to get better any time soon. So here is an idea. Ask the Lord for a verse of Scripture, a promise in the Bible, to help you get through this. And when that verse jumps off the page into your heart, make it the theme of your life while you slog your way forward. However dark the nighttime sky might be, you can always look up at that North Star promise, get your bearings again, and keep going. But wallpaper your reality with the Word of God."

So we did. We asked the Lord to personalize to us some biblical encouragement of his own choosing. And he did. Jani was reading 1 Peter 5 soon thereafter, and verse 10 was a direct hit— in the best of ways: "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." We seized that verse.

We memorized 1 Peter 5:10, discussed it, prayed over it. Jani wrote it out on 3×5 cards and taped them to the inside of the kitchen cupboards, so that every time she went to get a glass or a plate, there was 1 Peter 5:10. I wrote it out and stuck it to the visor in my truck so that, at a red light, I could look up and be strengthened by 1 Peter 5:10. We never let that verse out of our sight. And in ways we could not have imagined, God has proved faithful to his promise. To this day, whenever Jani and I experience some restoring, confirming, strengthening, or establishing mercy, we look at one another and say, "1 Peter 5:10!" In fact, we did so just yesterday. That word from above didn't merely help us cope. It redefined how we experience reality. It kept me in the ministry.

David Powlison understood human despair. He understood how God helps sufferers. He understood that what we need is a hope dependent on nothing in this world but grounded in God alone. The word himself in 1 Peter 5:10 has become, to me, one of the most precious words in all the Bible— God, not delegating the task to any angel, but God himself getting personally and directly involved with us in our real need. How glorious.

At the time, I have to admit that, though my heart resonated with 1 Peter 5:10, I struggled to believe it. Jani believed it more than I could. But David was right. And thanks to his wise counsel, I turned toward the Lord with the weak faith I had. And gradually I was enabled to believe it more and more. And now I know, at a deep and personal level, that God himself restores, confirms, strengthens, and establishes us, when we have nothing to offer him but our sorrow and need.

Thank you, David. Thank you.

Isn't that a great story? That's a *Genesis 12-Abram-built-an-altar-there* story.

Let me ask you: Are you suffering right now? Do you feel overwhelmed? Do you feel like you're going crazy? Do you feel like the pain is so deep that you might not make it one more day? Are you in the pit of despair? Depressed? If so, ask the Lord for a verse of Scripture, ask Him for a promise in His word, that can help you get through this season of your life. Ask the Lord to personalize to you some Biblical encouragement of His own choosing, and then plaster it everywhere. Write it out on 3×5 cards and tape them to the insides of your kitchen cupboards, so that every time you go to get a glass or a plate, you see it. Write it out and stick it to the visor in your car so that, at a red light, you can look up and be strengthened by it.

And then, in ways that you could not have imagine, God will prove faithful to His promise. Besides, what do you have to lose?

And then, when that verse jumps off the page into your heart, make it the theme of your life while you slog your way forward in this darkness. However dark the nighttime sky might be, you can always look up at that North Star promise, get your bearings again, and keep going. And, you'll find yourself doing what Abram did: *worship*.

The late David Powlison, along with Martin Luther, AND along with Abram and Co.- they would tell you today-
WALLPAPER YOUR REALITY WITH GOD'S WORD.

"For God So Loved the World That He Said, 'Pssst! Abram. Pack Your Bags!'"
Genesis 12:1-10
Sermon Study Questions

1. Martin Luther wrote Psalm 118:17, "I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord," on his wall. What favorite verse would you write on the wall?

2. READ Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29. How are we included in the promise of Genesis 12?

3. What 2 things stood in the way of Yahweh's promise to Abram?

4. Discuss this quote from the sermon: *Understand this: Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where Jesus is preparing us for things in the future. We may not understand right now how it's all going to work out, but God has bigger plan for our lives. We simply have to cling to Him, cling to His promises. God is doing things in our lives right now where He is taking us through trials that will enable us to be able to go through the trials we're going to go through in two years, five years, ten years. The things that we are going through right now may be God preparing us for what we will face in the future. Think about that.*

How does this change your perspective?

5. READ Genesis 12:7-8. Why did Abram build an altar 2x?

6. Discuss the big idea: *Wallpaper your reality with the Word of God.*

Discuss these quotes:

Iain Duguid

"The purpose of confessing our sins is not to render us miserable by simply reminding us what great sinners we are. It is to remind us of what a great Savior we have."

Bruce Waltke

"Christians are people of the ear, not of the eye."