

Go! Sermon Series
Abram Told to Go
Gen. 12:1-9
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Statistics say that most people in this room have either moved in the past 5 years, or will be moving in the next 5 years. My family and I are exceptions because we haven't moved recently and don't plan to move soon! But for a period of time in our lives, we moved a lot.

In 1997, my new bride and I were preparing to move from Jeffersonville, Indiana, to Indianapolis, where I was starting in seminary. On the day before we were moving, I was rushing home to pack up the last few boxes, and was in such a hurry that the local police decided to pull me over and congratulate me on my new marriage and upcoming relocation. They even gave me a special certificate to commemorate the occasion.

Two years later, when Leigh and I moved from Indianapolis to Columbus, Indiana, we asked a good friend to help us move and to drive the moving van to our new home. He must have been really excited to see it because he ran into the back of our car on the way there.

Two years later, we were once again packing, this time moving from our Columbus apartment to a church in Illinois. While the movers were loading up the truck with our stuff, our apartment was struck by lightning. We took that to mean that God wanted us out of Columbus as soon as possible!

Moving is just a reality of our life today. But that's also true of people in the Bible. Have you ever noticed how often people in the Bible are changing their addresses? When you read the Bible, it's hard to find anyone who is seriously being used by God who isn't on the move. Noah set sail, Moses walked the wilderness, the disciples uprooted themselves when Jesus called. I'm still looking for the verse that says, "And Slackerdiah laid around his house for 30 years and became a great man of faith." I don't think I'll find it. The truth that the biblical nomads make real for us is that faith is discovered along the way, and that's what we'll be exploring in this fall sermon series.

We start with probably the most momentous move in the Bible. You may not know that the shift between Genesis 11 and 12 has profound implications for us. Through the first 11 chapters of Genesis, God's work with humanity has been on a grand scale and marked by several starts and stops. God created the world, but then kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden because they disobeyed. Because humans were so evil, God had to wipe the slate clean and start over with Noah and his family. Well, we humans messed up again, at the beginning of chapter 11, tried to build a tower that would reach all the way to God so we could be on God's level. So, after a deep sigh and a resigned, "Oy vey!" God decides to take a different approach. Instead of painting with a broad brush, start in Gen. 12, God was going focus in on one particular man and his family.

But things don't get off to a great start. At the end of Ch. 11, we get a genealogy that runs down through Terah and his son, Abram (who won't become Abraham until later). We're told in the midst of that listing that Abram was married to Sarai, who was barren. So, at the end of Ch. 11, we know that Abram is the end of the line as far as the genealogy goes, and unless something changes, he's the end of the line period. His wife

is not able to give him a son. Abram and Sarai have no potential to continue their lineage. It's like when I was searching for a church camp out in the farmland of Illinois, and my GPS unit led me down a dead-end road. I got to the end of the road and looked out into this cornfield and my GPS said, "Your destination is ahead." And I shouted at it, "No it's not!" I was stuck at a dead end, just like Abram and Sarai.

I think God must love dead ends, because it gives God a chance to turn our world upside down. Moses led the Israelites to the shores of the Red Sea, but couldn't get across. Dead end. Jesus, the supposed Messiah gets crucified and buried in a tomb. Dead end. Abram and Sarai, who are supposed to be fruitful and multiply, are burdened with barrenness. Dead end.

That leads us to Ch. 12, when the God who created the cosmos and the platypus and everything else invests in one particular person and promises him two things: God promises to lead Abram to a new land and to make him a great nation. Sounds wonderful, but there are two small problems. First, Abram already had a place to live, and second, you can't have a great nation without some offspring. Dead end.

And yet, God says, "Go!" Would you have gone? I would like to say "yes," but to be honest, I'm pretty comfortable and settled right here. And I'm sure Abram was, too. Moving for him involved not just uprooting his family but moving his livestock and business and workers. It also meant leaving behind his hometown and family and friends. I can relate. When I was 11 years old, right after my mom married my step-father, she pulled me aside and asked, "How's your sense of adventure?" Then she told me we were moving – away from my dad, my grandparents, the only home I'd ever known – to Washington, D.C. I should have been excited about this new adventure, but I all I could think about was what I was leaving behind.

So then, why did Abram go? Wasn't he afraid he'd get lost, geographically and spiritually? I'm reminded of the bumper sticker that says, "I took the road less traveled – now where the heck am I?" I guess he went because God said, "Go!" But God didn't just say, "Go!". God said, "Go to the land I will show you," which means Abram wasn't going alone. God is packing a bag and accompanying Abram on this journey. God would be with him.

There's a major difference between a travel agent and a tour guide. A travel agent will help plan your trip, book your travel, find hotels, but when it's time to leave, your travel agent says "Bon Voyage" and stays behind. But a tour guide goes with you. A tour guide knows all the sights to see and places to avoid and tips and tricks and shortcuts. If you get stranded in a strange land, a travel agent is nowhere to be found, but a tour guide is right there with you. So, knowing God the tour guide is with him, Abram just goes.

If we want to be honest, what choice did he have? The only other option was to stay put and grow old, and where's the sense of adventure in that? We are all vulnerable to the feelings of complacency and stagnation. The metaphor of the life of faith as a journey is a challenge to our modern ideologies which yearn for settlement, security, and placement. And yet, if we stay put too long spiritually, we begin to think that God stays put, too. We begin to think that God has become as stagnant as our own beliefs, set in concrete and unbending. But God is much more fluid than that. If we are too comfortable, too secure, or too into having control, we may find ourselves at a dead end.

This notion of following doesn't have to be geographical, although for Abram it was. Because we are called to be followers, I believe God constantly calls settled people

on pilgrimages and down new roads. I believe God calls us to leave certain situations so God can bring us into other, better situations that will allow us to use our gifts to serve. And that can be painful because there's no iron-clad guarantee that everything will be all right. Sometimes it's safer to stay in the dead end staring at the corn field than to leave the GPS behind and venture down unknown roads.

This passage always makes me think of the brave souls who left their homes on in this part of the country and ventured westward into the unknown frontier. Can you imagine being a mother or father, your kids loaded up in the covered wagon, a full supply of Cheerios and juice boxes, heading across territory with no rest stops or even paved roads? Can you imagine, as you're winding your way across the plains of what would become Kansas, and in the distance you see these tiny little points, and you think, "Aw, those rocks are so cute!" And the closer you get those rocks turn into the Rocky Mountains, and you're not sure how you're going to get past them, and the horses are tired, and the kids have watched every episode of "Paw Patrol" 14 times. And yet, you go, because the call to follow God is stronger than the desire to stay put, so strong that even the Rocky Mountains aren't dead ends.

We are not called to live dead end lives, and God promises not to leave us there, if we are willing to follow. What is guaranteed is that God will be with us on the journey. And our trust is rewarded with the rich experience of traveling with God through the mountains and valleys of life. The road is never easy, and there will surely be pain along your journey, and there may be times you long for comfort and security, but what other choice do you have? Sure, we can stay put, but is that all there is to life, just staying put? What risk is God asking you to take? Where is God calling you to go? As the band Switchfoot sings in its song, "Afterlife," "Everyday the world is made, a chance to change But I feel the same. And I wonder why would I wait till I die to come alive? I'm ready now, I'm not waiting for the afterlife."

I don't believe any of us are called to stay put. Then this faith thing would be easy! No, God is calling us to go, to hoist our sails, to step on a new path. It may mean leaving behind something that is safe or comfortable. It may be the exciting journey of working in a new ministry or helping someone you don't know. It may be the scary journey of confronting the demons of your past in therapy or trying to heal a broken relationship. But remember, God is not a travel agent; God is a tour guide, going with us into whatever new adventure awaits. Abram didn't have to go; neither do we. By going, Abram was blessed beyond measure by God, including a family he never thought he could have. What blessing might we miss by just staying put?