**Forward2018: The Blessed Life (Genesis 12:1-4, 2 Corinthians 9:8)**

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The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. (Genesis 12:1-4)

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

# Introduction

We are excited about God’s blessings, but we have a very narrow view of God’s blessings. We tend of equate God’s blessings as merely having good health, wealth and material possessions. To us, God’s blessings mean that everything is going well, when all is calm and when there are no storms in life. If this is true, what about those godly Christians who are going through tough times or those Christians who are persecuted for their faith? Does it mean that God does not bless them? What if God’s blessings come to you in a way that you did not expect it to?

We need to realize that not all open doors are God’s doors, and some closed doors are God’s doors. God’s blessing is more than just health and wealth. God’s blessing is amazing when you begin to live the blessed life.

God made the Abrahamic covenant with a person called Abram, who was renamed and called Abraham. Ever since Adam fell, God set in place a grand plan to save mankind. In God’s sovereign plan, He appeared to Abram and called him to go to Canaan. God called Abram when he was 75 years old. At such an old age, it required a lot of faith and obedience for Abram to go when he was called by God. Abram went as God told him to.

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him. (Genesis 12:4)

Peter and Andrew, when they were called to be Apostles, left their nets and followed Jesus at once. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, left their boat and followed Jesus without delay.

Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. He saw two brothers. They were Simon (his other name was Peter) and Andrew, his brother. They were putting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Follow Me. I will make you fish for men!” At once they left their nets and followed Him. Going from there, Jesus saw two other brothers. They were James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were sitting in a boat with their father, mending their nets. Jesus called them. At once they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus. (Matthew 4:18-22)

Many of these people whom God called, obeyed in faith right away. For many of us, when God calls us to do something, we postpone and delay our obedience.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)

It takes not just obedience to go when God calls you, but it takes faith as well. Abraham had to leave his home country, his place of comfort, to go where God called him to. By faith he obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. That is why Abraham is called the father of faith. God does not need anything dramatic from us. He just needs us to say yes to Him.



Due to Abraham’s obedience, God made a covenant with him. The covenant ceremony is recorded in Genesis 15. The nature of the covenant required both parties to pass between the pieces of animals, which means that the fulfilment of the covenant was dependent upon both parties keeping to their part of the covenant. The smoking fire pot and the blazing torch in the passage represented God, which passed between the halves of the animals. God caused Abraham to fall asleep so that he would not be able to pass between the carcasses. God alone walked through the halves, without Abraham. This showed that the covenant was undoubtedly a promise made by God, and fulfilment of the covenant fell to God alone.

We grew up in a religious culture, thinking that God will punish us if we do not do what He says. However, what God did during the Abrahamic covenant ceremony, indicates God’s true nature of love for us. All God requires of us is to just say yes to Him, and He promises to take care of the rest.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

# 1 Three main features of the Abrahamic Covenant:

## The promise of the land

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

God has chosen a land to give to His people.



## The promise of descendants

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2)

Abraham and Sarah were very old and they were very unlikely able to have children. However, the miracle of birth happened, which led to Abraham having offspring that are too numerous to count.

## The promise of blessings and redemption

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3)

We are redeemed today through Jesus Christ.

# Out of these are the 4-fold blessings:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2)

## I will make you into a great nation

Abraham did not have any children, until God blessed him with Isaac.

## I will bless you

## I will make your name great

## You will be a blessing

God has blessed us so that we can be a blessing to others. It is a privilege to be a blessing. Abraham was blessed because of his immediate and unquestionable obedience to God, and through him, we too are blessed.

We can know what God wants us to do when we listen to what He is saying to us. Therefore, listening to God’s voice is paramount to knowing God’s will for our lives and understanding God’s blessings in our lives. Abraham understood the importance having the presence of God in his life. The presence of God is the culminative fruit of a surrendered life to God.

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**BIG IDEA: The Presence of God is the Blessed Life**

The blessed life is not about what God can give us, but it is the presence of God in our lives. It is not about doing something for God just so that you can get something from Him. Following Christ is not about seeking to receive blessings. He is not a dispensing machine or an automated teller machine (ATM). It does not matter how much God gives you in return for your obedience, whether two-fold or five-fold or ten-fold. God looks at the heart. He looks for dedicated hearts who genuinely seek to obey Him.

God’s desire is to have a relationship with us. He is a relational God, and the evidence of this concept is found in the Trinity, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in relationship with each other. God created us so that He can have a relationship with us. When God created mankind, Adam and Eve, He walked in the garden with them. Man and woman enjoyed a relationship with Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. God knew exactly where they were hiding, yet He called out to them, asking, “Where are you?” This is the cry of the heart of God, resonating throughout the centuries even to us today. He calls out to us, seeking us to draw close to Him.

With-ness: God wants to be with us, and He wants us to be with Him. God wants to have a relationship with us. God wants to manifest His presence in our lives, it is His desire to bless us. Life on earth becomes a blessing when we steward it well.

Sent-ness: The with-ness produces the sent-ness. When the with-ness is fulfilled, the sent-ness follows. God wants to send us out to bless others. He wants to bless the world through us.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Matthew 4:19)

Before we become fishes of men, we need to be with Him first.

He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach. (Mark 3:14)

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus ascended to heaven so that the Holy Spirit can be with us. The Holy Spirit is not a force or a thing. The Holy Spirit is a Person with whom we can have a relationship with. He is someone who can relate to us.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28)

Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.” (Exodus 33:15)

Moses understood the importance and the blessing of the presence of God. The blessing of the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, did not matter to him. If God is not going to go with them, Moses did not want a part of it. Moses wanted God’s presence more than anything else.

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:21-22)

Even in the desert, God was with His people. He never left them. His presence was manifested in a pillar of cloud by day to provide shade from the scorching heat of the desert sun, and by night in a pillar of fire to provide light to guide them on the way.

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (2 Chronicles 7:1)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Immanuel means “God with us”.

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). (Matthew 1:22-23)

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

God’s Spirit is now living in the body of Christ. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. (Acts 2:3)

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:3-4)

# The Blessed Life of God’s Presence:

## Comes from faith and obedience

We do not like post-dated cheques because we are unable to cash it in immediately. We want it now. However, God’s blessings are often post-dated cheques. God’s blessings might not come at a time when we want it to, or in the way in which we expected it to. That is because God wants to stretch our faith.

## Allows us to live in the will of God

Sometimes, clarity is not that important. Most of us want everything to be clear before we make a move. However, God often reveals His plans to us in bite-sizes. If God revealed everything to us at one go, we will not need to walk by faith anymore.

Learn to live in the will of God every day. Do not wait to learn how to make decisions on big decisions. Learn to make decisions on small decisions every day. God is interested in the little details of our lives.

## Allows us to live with a spirit of contentment

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:12-13)

When we have the presence of God, what we used to think as important is not as important anymore. The Apostle Paul is saying that the presence of God is enough for him.

## It develops the spirit of generosity because nothing I have is my own

When we have the presence of God, we understand that nothing is more important than God Himself.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. (Psalm 84:10a)

The blessed life of God’s presence is manifested in the covenant renewal prayer, which was adapted by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, for use in services for the renewal of the believer’s covenant with God. The covenant renewal prayer carries the spirit that as long as God is with us, nothing else matters.

**Covenant Renewal Prayer**

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full, let me be empty,

let me have all things, let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

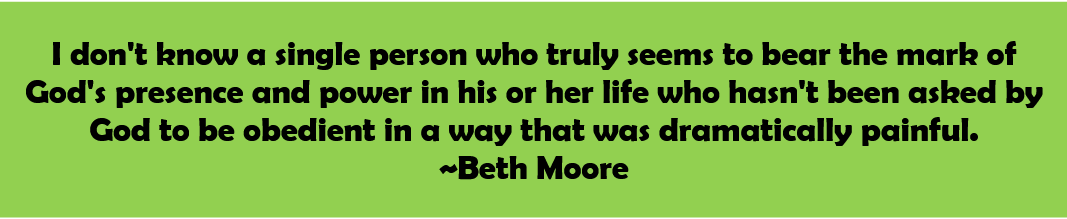
Amen.

# Conclusion

The blessed life is not about what we can get, it is about what we can give. The Scriptures say that the more we give, the more we are blessed. That can only happen when we understand the blessing of the presence of God. Many of us are so trapped in the cares and concerns of the world that we are paralyzed from serving God. It is important for us to realize that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We need to understand that the presence of God *is* the blessed life. The blessed life is not determined by how well things are going in our lives, but it is determined by how well our lives are when things are not going well. Things may not be going well in our lives, but we can have the assurance of the presence of God in our lives, from which we find true and lasting joy and peace.

Below is a picture that depicts the presence of God in our lives. It is a picture of a parent holding a child’s hand. There is a confidence in little children that they can go anywhere and do anything when they are holding onto a parent’s hand. God’s presence in our lives is a picture of Him holding our hands. This is what it means to have the presence of God in our lives. This is what it means to have God with us.





Sermon summary contributed by Anthea.