

Preached by Dr. Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
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Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26
Genesis 12:1-9

TWELVE YEARS OF EDUCATION

Does it seem to you that life is divided into segments? It said that Abram moved in segments of faith toward Negeb. Twelve is a nice number at first glance to divide your life into; twelve-year segments. First there's that 12 years before you can graduate, give or take. Then there's that subtle thing that you hardly notice, the 12 years of education preparing you just to be a teenager. And now, in our culture, after high school graduation, it's not uncommon at all for it to take another 12 years to settle on exactly where we want to go, what we would like the nature of our education to be, and who we would like to be with when we finally do arrive at our life passion and goal.

Twelve years—think back to when you graduated from high school from that momentous time in your life. What were the memories that you had? What were the fears that you harbored? What were the hopes and dreams, the struggles, the tests? There is another 12 years in our lives that determines how we will live by faith. It's that 12-year segment, 12 years of growing up from what is comfortable to what really does become a challenge. Twelve years of growing into a life that is dramatically different than we ever thought it would be before. I don't know where that 12 year segment is for you, or if it is 12 years at all, but we all have to go through a transition. We all have to go through that time when we say that I do want this faith experience to have more meaning than it's had before.

The story of Abram (It's so hard not to refer to him as Abraham since we're so used to what happened in all the other segments of his life. It's not until the 22nd chapter of Genesis when he gets renamed.) is a story that is our story; it is a story of transition. We begin a journey, we believe we know where we are headed, then there's the next phase of life, the unexpected. So we walk by faith because we do not know everything that will happen or every outcome. Would you like life better if you could predict what would happen in your own future? Would it make it easier for you if you knew in advance? There are so many things that we hope for, that we long to be a reality. Will God guide those we love into a path of faith? Will we in time be as financially secure as we think we need to be? Will we see the positive outcome of what we think is our biggest challenge today?

I can't imagine how many times Abraham must have prayed, "Oh God, I understand that you're going to go with me, and I understand that I'm going to be a blessing to others and that my family is going to be a blessing for other families, but how? How, God, how are you going to do that? What will it look like after 12 years?" The only assurance that Abraham received was the promise that God would go with him. If he would leave what had become comfortable and go to a place that was not yet holy, but a place that would become holy because of what God would do through Abraham and his family. Think of it, how will I survive without the protection of my father's house? How will I be a father of

a great nation if I have no children? How, O God, if you give me a child then ask me to give it back to you, how will that make me a blessing?

Yes, there are details and God supplies a hint, but the details don't tell the how. Yes, there's a son, Isaac, and a grandson, Jacob, and there are eventually 12 tribes, all from this one great patriarch. Important snippets, hints, of what God is doing—but if we re-read this story of Abraham and his call, of Jesus coming and fulfilling the promises that God made to Abraham in a radically new way, we have to ask ourselves, if receiving instructions then believing in those instructions and acting upon them are very different than we might have planned. God makes a promise; but then acting on that promise, our responding by God's grace to that promise, and our receiving enough courage by the Holy Spirit to change our lives because of that promise.

The same will be true for our graduates for the next 12 years. It was true for us. Yes, we will obey when God calls us and slowly but surely if our life was to ever have meaning, we will learn to be a blessing to others. Yes, over the next 12 years we will learn new lessons—lessons that will guide us as we graduate into ever-progressive stages of faith. Wherever we go, God will go with us and as God becomes more powerful in our lives, we will learn to listen to one another. We will learn not only to hear God and to honor God, but we will learn over the next 12 years that simply by calling upon God's name, our relationships can become holy and where we live can become sacred. Where we go will be by God's leading, but we will be given the chance wherever that is to be peace-makers.

We forget the story of Abraham at our own peril; for remember, he leaves with Sarah and his nephew, Lot, and they take everything they have and immediately after arriving to the promised land (that term never appears in the Bible exactly like that), Abraham has to divide what he has with Lot, and he has to put his own needs second. He has to put Lot's needs first if he is going to fulfill that call.

Let's allow God to speak to us. Let's put the needs of those around us before what we believe are our essentials. Let's know that there's a new understanding to what it means to be called by God—claimed by God. There's a new relationship with those we love and those with whom God has placed us in this congregation. Isn't it amazing that if we want to be fulfilled, we can't know all the "hows," we can't even know all the details in advance. But we can know that God will always help us to be open to a fresh understanding of where we are being led and who we are being asked to bless.

So may it be for every stage of our faith education. So may it be for every graduate so then you will know life as it was meant to be in its fullest and in abundance.

Amen.