I. Introduction:

A. Yes, The 9:01 is coming back. We are facing some Sundays where things are getting a bit tight in here. Most of our pinch points are not in this room, they are in other parts of the building - and they are not on Sundays. But we are now facing Sundays where this room is filling up. So, please do consider The 01.

B. Pause.

C. Great to see you. Happy Fall. Greetings to those at CR, HP, VH, your home. Where ever. As you have been hearing, it's "go time."

1. In two weeks, Alpha begins. If you have big questions. If you feel like you're auditing the faith. If you would describe yourself as a skeptic, Alpha is for you. It's a safe place to explore life's biggest questions. It's also great place to invite a friend who has big questions or doubts – who is clearly on the outside looking in.

2. And lots of other things are also ramping up as you have heard: small groups, Bible studies, service projects and more. In two weeks, we have our next big Lakelight event. Dr. Warren Kinghorn – who did his medical studies in psychiatry at Harvard and a PhD in theology at Duke - will be speaking on anxiety. I met Warren a few months ago. Very excited that we were able to get him here. You don't want to miss it and you do need to sign up. Two of our last Lakelight events sold out, so don't put it off.

II. So, this is week four of a forty week series which is unfolding around two big ideas.

A. First, we need to be aware of the "music" that is playing in our head. There is always "music" – I am using the term metaphorically here for your worldview, your self-talk, your working assumptions about life. The Story you think you are living that is playing in the background and shaping everything. Our lives are formed and informed, they are narrated and directed by a set of ideas and ideals that we hold whether we know this or not. Whether our grid is true or not. We all have an interpretive grid that interprets what's happening. One of the claims animating this series is that we need to interpret things correctly. We need to embrace the right metanarrative – that we need to be sure that our worldview - our answers to life's most fundamental and important questions – lines up with what really is. We need to get The Story right.

B. A second big idea is that we find this in the Bible - this all-time best-selling book. This collection of 66 books written over 1,500 years by forty different authors across three different continents that tells one story. Many people know Bible Stories (David and Goliath, The Prodigal Son) but do not understand the message. Have not seen the way it all works together. Do not see the Arc of Redemption.

C. So far we've looked at:

Mike Woodruff © Aug. 2026

1. Genesis 1 – which claims that there is a God and he created (and owns) everything, including you and me.

2. Gensis 3 – which describes a failed rebellion that led to the Fall, to everything breaking, to a curse and to The Promise. The promise made by God that He would fix the mess. He would rescue us. He would send help – the Seed of Woman who would crush evil.

3. And Genesis 4 – 11. Last week we walked through a series of events - Cain killing Abel, the rise of Lamech, the flood, the Tower of Babel – that made it clear that we're too seriously broken to fix ourselves.

a) We are not called sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. This is a remarkably unpopular view that many deny. One story (one metanarrative) holds that we are good getting better, and that we just need a bit more time and education - a bit more technology and a few more government programs - and everything will work. Life will be great and everyone will hold hands and be happy. The Story we find in this book says, "that dog won't hunt." And we should be able to see that.

b) I was rereading Kurt Vonnegut's last book before he died. He was an atheist and much angrier than I remember. But I think he saw somethings quite clearly. In one chapter he argued that while humans are capable of extraordinary kindness, we are also prone to breathtaking cruelty. And he said, read history or look at the front page of any paper on any day. We are a mess.

D. So far, we've established that God made us – so we are highly valued – but we are also deeply broken and it's become clear that all depends on God keeping his promise. We need God to send help. In my explanation, that is all pretext. That is all background. You read about that – Gensis 1-11 – in the program you are given when you go to the theater.

E. Today – with Genesis 12 – the story starts. The curtain rises on Act One Scene One. We are watching the story to see what happens. Like virtually every story – where things are good and then something bad happens and you read (or watch) to see how things resolves. Who wins? We are watching this to see if God keeps his promise. Does he send help?

F. As the curtain rises on Genesis 12. – on Act One Scene One - we see a man. His name is Abraham and, best we can tell today putting together all the historical artifacts we can assemble, he was nobody at the time. He was semi-nomadic shepherd wandering around in the Fertile Crescent in the Middle of the Broze Age. There does not appear to be much about him to set him apart other than this: God makes him an offer.

Mike Woodruff © Aug. 2026

G. Abraham will earn his place alongside those who are known by their first name. I'm not thinking so much about Cher, Madonna and Tiger as much as I am Moses, Napoleon and Winston. Abraham will be bigger than all of them.

H. Back in 1990, George Will wrote a column nominating Thomas Jefferson as the Person of the Millennium. *Time* magazine had just selected Mikhail Gorbachev as it's Person of the Decade and was already receiving nominations for Person of the Century. Because he believed the defining story of the previous thousand years was the emergence of the nation-state and the expansion of political freedom—and because America represented the triumph of both—he chose Jefferson.

I. *Time* never choose a Person of the Millennium and I'm not going to enter that debate, but I will say that looking back, the Man of the Millennium for 2,000 BC was Abraham. And there is no close second. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all claim Abraham as a foundational figure.[1] Some call he is the greatest human character in the Bible.[2] Abraham is about to become somebody as you will see.

III. **Now the Lord said to Abram.** *Abram* is not a typo. It was his name until God changed it. In the Bible, names are more than the sound made when someone wants to get your attention. They say something about the person, so if the person changes – if they set out on a new course - God occasionally changes their name.[3] Jacob becomes Israel. Simon becomes Peter. Sarai – Abram's wife – is going to become Sarah. And Abram (which means exalted father) will become Abraham (father of multitudes).

IV. **Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house** – i.e., leave all you know. Leave your family, your people, your inheritance and your security. This would not have been an easy call.

A. For starters, we have reason to think Abraham was in a good spot. He wasn't leaving a primitive backwater. Excavations at Ur – some of which we saw a few years ago at the British Museum in London[4] - uncovered royal tombs filled with jewelry, musical instruments and elaborately decorated furnishings. Abraham was being asked to leave one of the ancient world's wealthiest and most sophisticated cities to head who knows where.

B. Secondly, this actually sounds a bit like the punishment given to Cain after he killed Abel. To be clear, God is not punishing Abraham, but he is making a big ask. He occasionally does that.[5] God occasionally calls us to new patterns, new loyalties to take a sacrificial step. He does not do this to punish us, but to shape and grow us.

V. **and go to the land which I will show you;** Abraham is asked to agree to go before he is even told where he is going.

VI. and I will make you a great nation the word is *goy*. It's generating a lot of ink right now because of questions about the nature of nations and nationalism. To be clear, the modern nation state doesn't come around until the 17th century.[6] *Goy* does not refer to a modern nations with borders and bureaucracy. It's hard to know how Abraham would have understood this promise back then.

VII. **and I will bless you, and make your name great.** This is God's answer to Babel. At Babel, the people said, "Let's make a name for ourselves." Here God says to Abram, "I will make your name great." This is not a small thing. It reinforces the contrast between those whose identity is found in their achievement versus those whose identity is from God.

VIII. **and so you shall be a blessing, and 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.** This offer is described a couple more places. Basically, God promises Abram land (he owns none) and descendants (he's 75 and has none) and says he will bless everyone through him, although he has no obvious power to accomplish anything of the sort.

IX. Genesis 12:4: **So Abram went, as the Lord had told him. And so, we are still talking about him today.** Abraham obeyed. This is very important. More on this in coming weeks.

X. Today I want to make two big points. There is a lot going on, but Claude told me I had too many points.

A. I don't want you to miss that Abram was not blessed merely for Abram's sake. He was blessed so that he might bless others. God did not choose one man and one family because he was giving up on everyone else. His plan is to rescue and bless all the families of the earth through this man. And this idea of people being blessed so that they can bless others – Help others. Serve others – is going to be on frequent display.[7]

B. I think it's important to note that Abram – like virtually every other big name in the Bible - is a bit of a lout. Many people assume that God only uses people of exceptional strength, character and faith. They think that people like Abraham are flawless spiritual heroes. That is not true. Before Genesis 12 is over, Abraham throughs his wife under the bus. When it looks like he is in danger – when some powerful men visit them and express interest in Sarah – which might lead them to kill him - he basically says, "You're interested in my sister. Take her.[8] And they do. He gets her back, but not through any efforts by Abraham. It's worth noting that the heroes of faith are not always faithful.[9]

C. I'm also tempted to do a deep dive around identity. It is such a hot topic today. I noted that God says he will make Abraham great. He is going to give Abraham his identity. In the ancient world—and, in many cultures, until quite recently—identity was essentially received from the outside. Your family, community, place and obligations all told you who you were. Today many view that approach as confining and unjust. In recent years we've shifted to where some now argue that our deepest feelings and desires reveal who we are. So we need to express that and others need to affirm it. I would argue that the Christian answer to questions about our identity are neither, "Let your family or culture tell you who you are," nor, "Look inside and invent yourself." It is, "Let the God who made you tell you who you are." I think we see some of that being worked out for Abraham. I think some of you have real work to do here. You need to honestly ask yourself: is my identity the one God would have for me? Do I see myself first and foremost as

His child? Or are there other things that more clearly define me? My job? My fears? My political tribe?

XI. There is a lot going on here. Over the next year you can expect me to keep pointing back to the first part of Genesis and saying, "Remember back in September when we were here. Remember when we saw this. Well, what we are looking at here ties back to that."

XII. Today I want to do two things.

A. I want to give you a fly over of the next 800 pages – to be sure you see that from this point on (until, basically the end of Acts) it's all about Abraham and his descendants. (I am doing a workshop this Saturday that will go over some of this in more detail. I think there is still some room.)

B. And I want to jump ahead and note something very important that starts to pull the entire story together – something you might have missed.

XIII. So, the fly over of Act One. I find it helpful to suggest that the Bible is a story that breaks out in Three Acts, with the Old Testament being Act One, which unfolds over eight scenes. Before the curtain rises on scene one, we've read Genesis 1-11. We have the pretext. Creation. Fall. Promise.

A. The first is called the Patriarchs. Abram and Sarai are enter into a covenant with God, have their names changed and eventually have a son, Isaac. In turn, Isaac will marry Rebecah, and they will have two sons – Jacob and Esau. And – although it goes against the custom of privileging the firstborn (but sets a pattern of elevating the last and the least – the ones others overlook) we follow the blood line of Jacob (the younger of the two brothers). He and his two wives have 12 sons, who become the 12 tribes of Israel. Act One Scene One ends after one of the sons (Joseph) – who had been sold by the others into slavery – ends up rescuing his brothers during a famine. But – plot twist - Abraham's heirs move to Egypt, leaving behind the Promised Land.

B. Scene Two is the Exodus. Four hundred years later – after the Jews have fallen into slavery in Egypt – God sends Moses to help them escape Pharaoh and get back to the Promised Land. We have some epic action – the Ten Plagues. The crossing of the Red Sea. They eventually get to Mount Sinai and meet with God, get the 10 commandments and all that. But then, after walking to the edge of the Promised Land, they decide not to enter (not to trust God) and so they will spent the next 40 years wandering the desert.

C. Act One Scene Three is the Conquest. After Moses dies, Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land.

D. Scene four is the period of the Judges - a dark and repetitive cycle in which the twelve tribes all sort of do their own thing, occasionally coming together against a common enemy. But for the most part, everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Mike Woodruff © Aug. 2026

E. Scene Five is the United Monarchy. The Jews reject the idea that God is their king and demand a human one. They get Saul – who is from central casting (he looks the part), but is a failure. David (who is not only not the first born in his family,. He is from an easy-to-overlook tribe) becomes King and unites the country. He defeats their enemies and expands their borders and fills the treasury. Israel becomes the significant power under David and David's son, Solmon and at this point - about 1000 AD –it looks as if God is going to keep his promises to Abraham via the political and military power of Israel. But the kingdom is not the final answer. Its apparent success cannot cure the human heart.

F. After Solomon's death, the kingdom divides – this is Scene Six. The ten northern tribes retain the name Israel but jettison God. Every king proves unfaithful, and in 722 BC the Assyrian Empire captures them and they largely cease to exist.[10] The southern two tribes – which go by the name Judah, will have some faithful kings and some unfaithful ones and limp along until 586 BC when they are overrun by the Babylonians, the temple is destroyed, and most of them are carried into exile.

G. Scene Seven is the 70 years in Babylonian Exile. This is what we read about in the books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel.

H. After 70 years they return – we call this Scene Eight. They rebuild the wall and move back. And they are sort of limping along as the Old Testament ends. The promises made back in Genesis 3 have not been fulfilled. It looked like they were going to be. A nobody named Abraham became a mighty nation. But by the time the Old Testament ends, everything has fallen apart. And it is at that point that we slide into a 400 year intermission of radio silence from God.

1. There was another promise. In the last chapter of Malachi, which is the last book in the Old Testament. Malachi says, the next thing to happen will be when Elijah returns. But I'm outrunning my headlights. There are 36 weeks to go.

XIV. I want to highlight something as we head into communion.

A. Please know, whereas I have told the Story - the arc of redemption – as a play, where the first Act has eight scenes. Others outline The Story differently. For instance, many do so around the major covenants – the specific deals various people strike with God. There is one with Adam,[11] and one with Noah. And then this one with Abraham – where God says, follow me and I will give you land and descendants and bless all the families of the earth through you. And then we will have a covenant with Moses and then David and later a New Covenant with Jesus.

XV. There is so much going on. We are waterskiing over a lot. Let's keep out goal in mind. I want to be sure you see The Big Story because I want to be sure you have the right music playing in your head. So let me make an observation you might have missed about Abraham.

A. A couple weeks ago, I noted that in Romans, Paul referred to Jesus as the Second Adam. I noted that whereas the first Adam distrusted God while in paradise and failed the test, Jesus – the second Adam - trusted his Father while in a harsh wilderness and passed the test. Consequently, whereas through the first Adam sin entered the world and death through sin, in the second Adam, . I said, Jesus is the true and better Adam.

B. Today I want to be sure you see that Jesus is also the true and better Abraham.

1. Like the first Abraham, who left his father's house without knowing where the journey would take him in order to be a blessing to others, Jesus left his father's house to go on a mission to a very strange land in order to bless the nations.

2. But unlike the first Abraham, who endangered his bride in order to save himself, Jesus gave himself up in order to save his bride (the church).

3. Jesus is not just the true and better Adam. He is the true and better Abraham. And later we will see that he is the true and better Moses and David and Israel. Remember when I said, Jacob – whose name is later changed to Isreal (the people through whom God will bless the world) – I said he had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes, well Jesus will appoint twelve apostles because he is the true and better Israel - the faithful Son who succeeds where Israel failed and gathers a new people through whom God's blessing will go out to the world.

C. Right now, we are resting on the fact that Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who left his fathers home and went on a mission to a strange land, but unlike the first Abraham, did not through his wife (his bride – which is a New Testament name for the church) – he did not throw his wife under the bus, but sacrificed himself for her. He died for her. He died for you and me.

1. And that is what we rest on and that is what we celebrate and that is what we turn to now as we move into communion.

2. Let me pray for us as the Campus Pastors come forward to lead us now.

---

[1] The Jews consider him the founder of their faith and nation. In Islam he is second only to Muhammad (The Koran contains 188 references to him).

[2] Donald Grey Barnhouse said this. He went on to suggests that part of Israel's downfall might have been due to the fact that they esteemed Moses above Abraham. And that lead them to esteem the 10 commandments--and the law--more highly than they did Abraham's faith--and the message of grace.

Mike Woodruff © Aug. 2026

---

[3] We get a hint of this with the 3rd commandment, **Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain**. This does not simply mean "don't use the term God as a swear word." It means do not use his name dishonorably. But you see that the term name is more than the sound you identify with.

[4] In the British Museum in London, I saw an artifact from third-millennium-BC Ur. There is not much to it, but our tour guide listed it as one of the museum's most important objects because its materials testified to Ur's wealth and far-reaching trade networks.

[5] In Luke 14 he calls on people to leave Father, mother, wife, etc.

[6] The modern nation state is generally understood to emerge with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and developed over the centuries that followed.

[7] Divine election is never mere privilege; it is privilege ordered toward service. It will be expanded on throughout the New Testament – I'm thinking Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 and 14, where we learn about gifts. God gives us gifts that we are to use for the benefit of others. Everything everywhere belongs to God, and we are expected to steward his stuff in ways that please him.

[8] Sarai was, technically, his half-sister, as Genesis 20:12 later explains. But Abram uses that partial truth to create a profoundly deceptive impression. And in doing so, his lack of faith puts Sarai in peril. As so often happens, the person with less power pays for the fear of the person with more. "Abraham's crisis of faith becomes Sarah's crisis of safety."

[9] The point of Genesis 12 is not that God found an exemplary man who finally got everything right. It is much more that God's promise survive Abram's failure because the promise never rested upon Abram's performance in the first place. We will unpack some of that next week when we are in Gensis 15. Suffice it to say, Abraham is not the hero of the story.

[10] The northern tribes do not simply disappear from history. Some Israelites remain in the land, some join Judah, and Scripture continues to speak of the twelve tribes of Israel. But the northern kingdom ceases to exist as an independent nation.

[11] Scripture does not explicitly use the word covenant here, but the essential elements are present: God establishes a relationship with Adam, gives him a vocation and a command, warns of judgment for disobedience, and—after Adam's rebellion—promises that the offspring of the woman will one day defeat the serpent.

Mike Woodruff © Aug. 2026