

Who is God?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 August 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] And if you will turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 on page number 13.! We've been singing about God making a promise to Abraham.

! A promise that we'd be renewed through the generations. A promise that will be fulfilled in Jesus. But as we come to Genesis 12, we're going to look at the first nine verses, and we're going to ask ourselves from this text, who is God?

So let's hear God speak. The Lord had said to Abraham, 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 Abraham went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

[1:06] Abraham was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they'd accumulated, and the people they'd acquired in Haran. And they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abraham traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, To your offspring I will give this land.

So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abraham set out and continued towards the Negev. Amen.

We'll leave our reading there. So we're asking the question, who is God? But let's begin thinking about friendship and also loneliness. I wonder if you can remember a time when it felt like making friends was easy.

[2:09] For me, I go back to my little primary school. Maybe the first new friend I met, we supported the same football team. So of course we became friends for life.

In primary three, my little class of two grew to three. And boy number three, he used the same inhaler as I did.

And so of course we were friends forever. Friendship is something that can be so easy at times. And it's a wonderful gift. It's been well said that friendship is the gift that halves our sorrows and doubles our joys.

And that's one of the things that we hope a local church like ours is for people. A place where real friendship can be established. Because we know, don't we, friendship can be hard to come by. Even the government has recognized that. We have a task force. We are now in what's still known as a loneliness epidemic. Rising numbers of people who feel left out.

[3:13] Who have no meaningful social connections. Who would indicate they have a sense of intense loneliness much of the time. And that's so important because the impacts are huge.

Studies are now showing the impact on our cardiovascular system. Things like the rise in diabetes. The impact on mental health. Productivity at work.

All shaped by friendship or its absence and loneliness. So who is God? God is the one who speaks. And God is the one who invites us into relationship. Where we get to call God Father. Where we can have the Lord Jesus as a friend.

Where we can know, because the Spirit is in us, that we are never alone. The Bible says we are made for relationships. And wonderfully, as we see throughout the Bible story, God comes to give, to establish, to restore relationship.

[4:23] Last week, if you were here, we were at the Tower of Babel. And here is this moment where the world had walked away from God. And they were literally building a life apart from God.

And the outcome was confusion and scattering. And that could have been the end of the story. But what we just read is that this week, God comes calling.

God comes seeking. Abraham. An old man. An idol worshipper. And he changes Abraham's life by establishing relationship.

That got me thinking this week. About prayer. If you're a Christian, you'll have had a relationship with prayer through the years. But this week, I was thinking, what an amazing privilege.

You know, you're facing real challenges. And we get to pray. When something good comes into our life, and we can say thank you to God, knowing that kindness came from Him. I found myself asking God for wisdom.

[5:27] I found myself taking the needs of other people to God this week. I enjoyed going for a walk in the sunshine, and talking with Him at the same time. And I think one of the goals I have for today is basic and fundamental.

If we are Christians, to remind ourselves that God wants us to enjoy our life with Him. To enjoy a living relationship with God.

And if you're not a Christian, I want to show you what God offers to you. The connection, the relationship, the life, actually that we were all made for.

So God is the Lord who speaks, so that we might enjoy life with Him. That's where we're going this morning. So let's think, first of all, about the reality that God speaks.

And recognize with me that this God is the personal God. Four times in our text, you will see the name of God, the Lord.

[6:29] Verse 1, all in capital letters, also there in verse 4, 7, and 8. This is not a title. This is God's own name. This reminds us, fundamentally, God is personal.

He is not a force. He is not a concept or a construct. He is alive, active, and personal. In our text, we see this personal God.

He makes promises. He connects with people in covenant. We will hear Him say, I will be your God, and you will be my people. And this personal God is one that we can know in His actions.

The Bible is full of the actions of God. The world is full of the actions of God. God has created everything that we see, and He controls it all. He reveals Himself personally, and He personally acts to rescue people.

He shows steadfast love. He shows His glory. He is full of goodness and grace, because He is personal. And this is so helpful.

[7:34] You and I, we don't need to guess what God is like. And we should never imagine God is distant, some kind of faraway concept. Rather, we're reminded He is the personal God who comes near so that you and I, we might know Him.

And that's one of the wonderful things about the Abraham story. We see the personal God is acting everywhere. He calls Abraham. He makes promises. He intervenes when Abraham gets things wrong.

He directs Abraham's journeys. He reveals His actions in advance to Abraham. He commits to a covenant relationship, and He even gives him a son.

He is personal. And now, this same God that we're reading about here, He has personally revealed Himself in an even more striking way in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

John's Gospel tells us, He is the Word who became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory. To see Jesus in the Gospel is to see God.

[8:42] And this Jesus, He comes personally to us. Remember how we started our service? He opens the door, inviting us to welcome Him so that we might have the joy of life with Him.

He's the one who personally says, come to me and rest. and find salvation and enjoy life with God. Now, why start here? Well, again, it's because I think it's something we can forget or we can fail to enjoy.

And maybe if we're not Christians, we can have a misconception about what Christianity is.

Christianity is not about dull duty. And it is not about religious routine.

rather, it is personal, living relationship with God through Jesus, His Son. The one who comes to walk with us through life.

And so we're all invited to come and to taste and see that this personal God is good. So God is personal. Now, I also want to notice when God speaks, there is a pattern.

[9:53] verse 1, the Lord had said to Abraham, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. Now, if I was to ask any one of you, why are you here?

Why are you here in Edinburgh? There would be a range of answers. For some of us, it would be, well, education took me here. For others, work took me here. Or, this is where my family are. Or, this is the place where I've always lived. If I say, why are you here in church? Again, we probably get a range of answers. Perhaps you're here today because someone invited you here. You came with a friend.

Or, your family comes and so you come. What prompts the journey of Abraham that we read about in Genesis 12? It was God's direct call, wasn't it?

It was God's word to him. And, it's so interesting to see that the story of Abraham's life in Genesis, as it's told by the author, it begins and ends in a very similar way.

[10:52] In Genesis 12, we hear God say to Abraham, leave and go. And then, in a couple of weeks, we'll get to Genesis 22 and we hear God say, take and go.

And so, this says to us that the whole of Abraham's life, and more than that, the whole of the life of faith, is to find direction from God's word. For us, the Bible, the word of God.

But let's think about God's call to Abraham. Let's think about what did it mean to him? And what does it say about how God speaks and calls today? So, let me just identify one or two patterns. First, to recognize that when God calls Abraham, we should hear this as a new beginning. This is like new creation. Now, if you were to turn to Genesis 1, you would find this pattern.

God said something and it was so. God said, let there be light and there was light. Now, look at Genesis 12, 1. The Lord said, go. Verse 4, so Abraham went.

[11:57] It's new beginning. And in this new beginning, we need to understand the patience and the mercy of God. He is the one who created everything and everyone, perfect relationships, gave them every good gift.

And what people have done since the beginning is they've treated God shamefully. In the story of Genesis, eating the forbidden fruit, choosing a way of life that was entirely evil all of the time in Noah's day.

And then Tower of Babel wanting to replace and erase God from the picture. And what's God's response? God speaks. God seeks.

God starts again. And so there's wonderful hope for any and for all of us when we mess up, when we ignore God, when we're aware of our sin.

Maybe no story shows it better than the story Jesus told of the prodigal son in Luke 15. There was the son who said, Father, I can't wait till you're dead.

[13:02] Give me my share of the inheritance. And he went to a far country. And he wasted all his money. And he found himself living a desperate and a shameful existence. But what happened to that boy when he made the journey back home?

Beyond the shame and the rejection and the disgrace that that son had brought on his family, there was a father with open arms running, with tears running down his face.

You're home. I'm so glad to have you back. Let's have a feast. Our God is a God of grace and new beginnings.

So that's the second thing to notice about the pattern. So it's a new beginning. It's also gracious. There is in this call to Abraham a reversing of God's curse and God's judgment.

So we're going to do some maths together. Look at verses 2 and 3 and count how many times you read the word bless or blessing.

[14:10] 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 that's five times, yes? Five times blessing. In Genesis 1 to 11, guess how many times we are told that sin brings curse and judgment.

The answer? Five. What point is God making? He is making the point that God's grace is always the answer to our human sin and rebellion.

That while we deserve curse and judgment and separation, the God of grace offers his blessing. Abraham is part of that people who have been rejecting God's word, turning to do evil, creating a life without God.

The ruin, the separation, the shame, the misery. Abraham was part of that but God's response was grace. Abraham wasn't looking for God but God took the initiative to come near and wonderfully this gracious God will do it again in his son, the Lord Jesus.

[15:28] As he comes near, so near as to become one of us, to save us and to restore us and to remove our shame. So the call is both new creation and it's grace but recognize too that it's costly.

We heard that in verse 1, didn't we? Go from your country, your people and your father's household. There's three levels of cost. Everything is going to be given up by Abraham, his sense of identity and security, his place, his people.

He's going to leave it all because the Lord God, the personal God, has called him to do that and he has promised blessing if he will do that. I read this week of a pastor in Laos, Southeast Asia.

When he first heard about Jesus and he trusted in Jesus, he was rejected by his family and as he began to tell people in his community about Jesus, he found himself rejected and abused within the community and then in the fullness of time when he set up a church to worship Jesus, he was multiple times attacked and imprisoned.

The costly call but he still obeyed. Now we read in Matthew chapter 4 about the disciples. Their call from Jesus came at a cost, didn't it?

[16:57] To follow Jesus means he must come first and remember the response of the disciples. They leave their jobs, they leave their families, they leave their own plans behind because they've come to recognize well Jesus is God's king and he is calling us to loyalty and love and because they had experienced God's love in Jesus, they gladly followed.

But it was costly for you and for me. If you're a Christian, you will know this, to say that God is in charge and not me, that comes with cost. Sometimes the cost is our own personal comfort.

Sometimes the cost is we have to start struggling and battling against sin which we were previously really comfy in. Maybe the cost for us is feeling somewhat despised by our family or by our friends. So we've seen the person who calls. We've seen the pattern of God's call. Let's just think for a few moments about the promise itself because this is an amazing section of the Bible.

This is key in God's big story. So look with me again at verses 2 and 3 and think about the promise and think about what this means for Abraham. God says to him, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.

[18:24] Abraham, he's 75. His wife cannot have children. But now he's been told by this God that he's only just met that a nation will be formed from his family.

God doesn't stop there. Verse 2, I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. Again, this is a contrast to what was happening in Babel.

In Babel, they were building that great tower saying, hey, let's make a name for ourselves. But here is God coming to honor Abraham to build a name for him.

And then think about this idea of blessing. Here is God's goodness. Here is God's life flowing to Abraham. And notice the progress. So it begins with a promise that Abraham himself will be blessed.

And then as it goes on, Abraham's name will become a blessing. And then in verse 3, there's blessing for those who will treat Abraham well. And then it climaxes with this, that there will be blessing for the world through Abraham and through his family.

[19:37] That's a remarkable set of statements of blessings coming from God and then flowing from God, flowing from Abraham to the world.

We can think about Abraham functioning as a spiritual satellite dish. You know how satellite dishes work where they receive messages and then they convey and transmit those messages.

Well, here is Abraham and his family and they are receiving God's blessing. But they're not to keep it to themselves. This blessing, this goodness, this life from God, it's going to be transmitted all around the world.

It's a wonderful principle and priority that God actually still sets for the church. We receive God's grace and God's salvation and God's life so that we would then share it, transmit it to the people around us.

God speaks. So here's what we've seen about God. He is personal. He has a name and he calls to people and he makes great promises.

[20 : 43] Now this is a pattern that we will see repeating many years later when another would leave and go.

This time the eternal son of God leaving the worship and glory of heaven to go, to come into this world to become one of us.

And Jesus' journey was one of obedience to his father's call and to the father's great plan of salvation. The life of Jesus was a journey of faith which would take him all the way to the cross. And think about God's grace to people on the cross. Here is Jesus, the perfect one father loves him but he dies under God's curse.

Feeling the full weight of God's wrath against sin for our sin, for our shame and for our salvation to give us his blessing.

[21 : 50] And like those first disciples, Jesus now comes to us revealing God to us, revealing the message of good news to us and he makes great promises to us, the promise of forgiveness, the promise of new life, the promise of eternal life and he calls us to respond to know this life for ourselves.

So Jesus is how you and I can know God personally and we can hear God speak. So God speaks but we also need to think about Abraham's response and we can do that much much more briefly. So I imagine all of us are familiar with the principle that when things sound too good to be true they usually are.

This summer we narrowly avoided a vintage scam. I imagine we are not alone in that. There was a great item on sale at a really great price and there was a really convincing sob story because AI knows what it's doing and there was a really convincing but entirely fake set of delivery notifications and fake tracking numbers.

Well eventually we figured something's not adding up here. We got a bit suspicious. Did a wee bit of googling and discovered yep we'd been caught in a classic scam and the internet gave me the sage advice.

[23 : 28] On Vinted if something seems too good to be true it is. So there's my life lesson for today. But far more important for our purpose picture Abraham.

He's in his tent in this place called Haran. He is surrounded by his family. He is pretty wealthy as a man. He is elderly.

Perhaps he's feeling a sense of sadness because he doesn't have a son to carry on his family line and then one day he hears the Lord speak to him.

This man who has spent all his days worshipping statues maybe carving one himself he hears the living God speak and not just speak he hears these remarkable promises invited to follow God and to receive God's blessing and to know life with God.

So what's Abraham going to do? Is he going to think well this sounds too good to be true? We read didn't we Abraham's response I love the story of Abraham this picture of a man who is elderly for sure but his spiritual reflexes they're sharp.

[24 : 51] So he believes God he hears God speak tell him to do something and his reflex gets up he packs up and he's ready to go. And it's wonderful to think about that man Abraham as he responds to God the personal God the God who speaks his life has changed his destiny has changed his eternity has changed the day that God spoke and he answered.

So two things about Abraham's response first we see that faith obeys God. So we saw this already verse 1 the Lord said to Abraham go from your country and go to the land I will show you verse 4 so Abraham went as the Lord had told him.

There is no question about where Abraham's first loyalty lies. When God calls when the Lord God calls he comes first and it's remarkable too that when God promises even when these promises seem out of this world Abraham lives by faith and he trusts that nothing is impossible with God and even his journey has no clear destination he's just to go where God tells him to go he doesn't do what we do you know plot our journey in Google Maps rather this is faith that trusts God that takes God at his word and ultimately that takes God's hand on a wonderful journey of faith that's what we're invited into to live by faith to live with God through this life so faith obeys

God and the other thing that we see about Abraham's response is that faith worships God verse 7 verse 8 the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring I will give this land so he built an

altar to it appeared to him from there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel in the west and Ai on the east there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord and my my my folks they live up in the highlands in the black isle and they live really near a campsite and the campsite has a wonderful piece of philosophy to encourage us to not litter it says leave nothing behind but footprints and waste nothing but time there's more good wisdom for us Abraham Abraham Abraham would say I'm not listening to that wisdom because Abraham absolutely does leave something behind what does Abraham leave behind he leaves behind these altars he leaves behind evidence wherever he goes that he is now worshipping the one true and living

God so other people would see these altars and they'd see Abraham worshipping and future generations see these altars and they are taught this is where Abraham worshipped the one true and living God it's like a monument to his faith the true God is worshipped here what prompts him verse 7 is that the Lord appeared to him now the Lord is not just speaking now the Lord is showing his glory and again remember God is personal and he is active and he is living and he is a close relationship with Abraham and when he sees God's glory his instinct is to worship his family probably the only one surrounded by pagan nations but he will stand and he will bow and he will worship this God who has made himself known he functions like a light in the darkness he functions like a small church on a mission to share

[28:54] God's glory in the world faith obeys and faith worships who is God he is the personal God who speaks who calls he promises what's our response Genesis 12 is the story of God in his grace and goodness invading history coming to a world in rebellion and under the curse to reveal himself to make things new and to bring blessing and Abraham shows us the right response to that kind of act of God is faith and worship this morning do we see how this connects with our own stories do we recognize that God will once again invade history when Jesus his own son comes and ultimately Jesus will stand toe to toe against darkness and rebellion against Satan and sin and death and he will win a great victory for himself and for his people by way of the cross and then his resurrection so that the power of sin is broken so that forgiveness and life are made available to us and he calls us calls us into life with the living God and so it's remarkable that again in Jesus

God answers and speaks into the silence and the loneliness and the confusion revealing to us God is real God offers relationship and that to do that God will pay the ultimate price in Jesus to rescue and to reconcile so we join Abraham to live this life of faith and worship when we take up our privilege of going through life day by day enjoying life with God knowing God is working in us and for us hearing him speak to us in his words speaking to him in prayer will we make the most of that to be so thankful that he's given us this new identity and this new destiny at a time when so many people are searching for something more but don't know where to go as we find ourselves surrounded by confusion do we understand that

Jesus is God's answer and we can shine a light drawing others to know Jesus as saviour and his friend are you trusting this God today even today we've heard him speak to us in his word calling us out of our old life to place our trust in Jesus calling us to believe his promise that he will save us that he will forgive us he will be with us he will grant us eternal life if we place our faith in Jesus do we see that God speaks so that we can enjoy life with him both now and forever let's pray and give thanks our God and our Father we thank you that you did not leave the world to itself but rather in your grace and your goodness you entered in we thank you for demonstrating your love in calling Abraham and making these wonderful promises and ultimately as we see those promises fulfilled in the sending of your son the Lord Jesus we thank you that if anyone is in Christ Jesus he is a new creation now we thank you that Jesus has taken the curse for us so that we might enjoy the blessing of God and so we pray that we would enjoy the blessing of life with God even today enable us to worship with a sense of joy because of who you are because you are personal because you are good thank you for speaking to us and we pray in Jesus name!

Amen