Church Theme Learning Series - Session #1

CALLED BY GRACE, FORMED IN FAMILY

Called By Grace

Formed in Family

Remarks:

- **The purpose of this study material is to develop a deeper relational and spiritual connection between believers at different ages for walking together and progressing along the growth journey of being disciples of Christ.**
- **For Personal Devotion, please refer to pages 1 - 7. With a dual purpose of preparing for group gathering, the questions are the same as for Group Discussion.**
- **For Group Discussion, please refer to pages 1 & 8. Depending on the situations of different groups, group leaders may also choose and pick the questions from pages 1 – 7 that are suitable for their discussion. Group members are also encouraged to share their experiences related to this bible passage for helping others regarding its application.**

Bible Verse

Genesis 12:1-8

Introduction

From "Creation" to a "Called Family"

When the Bible speaks about humanity, it does not begin with what people want, but with the place where God has set them.

The opening chapters of Genesis do not portray a world in chaos where human beings grope for meaning on their own. Rather, the LORD first establishes order for life: humanity is created to live within relationships — connected to God, to one another, and to the land. People are able to find security and purpose not merely because they possess resources or abilities, but because they know to **whom they belong, near whom they live, and for what they live**.

Therefore, when Genesis 2 states, "It is not good for the man to be alone," this is not a sentimental consolation but a deeply directional declaration. Once human beings are cut off from relationships, life loses its wholeness. The family was not later "added on" as a solution to loneliness; from the very beginning, it was designed by God as a vessel — to carry love, responsibility, calling, and the living out of faith in everyday life. This theme will be developed more fully in February, but for January it is important to remember: **God's work often does not begin by giving people answers, but by placing them back into His order**.

Yet from Genesis chapter 3 onward, we see how quickly this order is disrupted by human choices. People decide good and evil on their own terms, and the result is not greater freedom but the progressive breakdown of relationships: tension arises between husband and wife, brothers shed one another's blood, and the relationship between humanity and the land becomes strained. By chapter 11, humanity seeks to build its own name and sense of security, only to end in scattering and confusion. The harder people try, the more they lose their sense of belonging; the more they seek stability, the more unstable they become.

It is precisely against this backdrop that Genesis chapter 12 appears. **The LORD does not begin by repairing the world's systems or establishing a grand national structure. Instead, He calls one person — together with his household — to step onto an unknown path.** It is as if God is saying: if this broken world is to be reordered, it must begin with a called family — with lives returning to trust, and with blessing set in motion once again.

In fact, this kind of calling is not unfamiliar to us.

Many Chinese immigrants to Canada understand the weight of "leaving": leaving behind familiar land, language, culture, and kinship networks to rebuild life in a new place. Some leave for the sake of the next generation, some for the future, and some discover along the way that even when life becomes stable, there remains a quiet, unspoken restlessness — as though a safe home has been found, yet it is still unclear what one is ultimately pursuing.

It is in such circumstances that Genesis chapter 12 speaks especially close to our hearts.

As Richmond Hill Chinese Baptist Church enters its thirty-fifth year, we too stand at a moment that calls for re-examination — not to deny the grace we have experienced, but to honestly ask once more: as a people gathered by the Lord, are we merely seeking to maintain what we have, or are we willing to listen again for God's call? When we speak of "family," do we simply treat it as an organizational unit of church life, or do we recognize that God often advances His redemptive work in history precisely through families and generations?

Reading Genesis chapter 12 in January is not about turning everyone into an adventurer who abandons everything. Rather, it invites us to relearn a deeper lesson:

Is leaving merely a relocation — or is it the beginning of faith?

Personal Devotion

PART ONE

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, NIV)

"Go" — "Leaving" as the "Starting Point of Faith"

The LORD's call to Abram comes with striking simplicity — almost with restraint. The text offers no explanation of reasons, no disclosure of the destination, and no reassurance to ease his anxiety. There is only a single command: "Go." This is not merely an instruction to "move house," but a summons that pulls a person out of familiar sources of security.

What is even more intriguing is that the text does not simply say "leave," but carefully identifies three things Abram must leave behind—"your country, your people, and your father's house." These three together formed the core security system of the ancient world:

- **Your country**: a familiar way of life and dependable resources;
- **Your people**: emotional support and a network of protection;
- **Your father's house**: identity, tradition, reputation, and a sense of belonging.

It is as though the LORD deliberately dismantles, layer by layer, the very things Abram is most inclined to cling to. This is not a call to deny the past, but to recognize that if life is built only on what can be calculated and controlled, then when God invites a person into a greater story, that person will always choose to stay where it feels safe.

This is the true tension of faith. **The starting point of faith is often not gaining greater certainty, but learning to let go before the outcome is visible.** The LORD does not firstly hand Abram a map; instead, He gives Abram Himself: "to the land that I will show you." In other words, the heart of the call is not where you are going, but **whom you are following.**

This tension takes different forms at different stages of life:

- **For the young or those just beginning their journey:**

Leaving often shows up in choices of lifestyle and values. Time, resources, and energy are limited, and taking faith seriously inevitably affects decisions about study, career, friendships, relationships, leisure, and spending. Because there is still room to explore different paths, the heart often wavers between surrender and "keeping options open." This is not rebellion, but fear of committing too early. Yet the call of Genesis 12:1 does not force an immediate answer; it brings a person before God to slowly learn one essential question: Who truly holds the authority over my life?

- **For those in midlife, carrying growing responsibilities:**

Leaving is less about changing location and more about relinquishing control. With established roles, responsibilities, and routines, the greatest struggle is often not discerning what God wants, but resisting change even after knowing it. At this stage, the call often touches carefully arranged plans — career paths, children's education, family finances, ministry roles. God's "Go" opens a crack in what feels stable and asks: Will you allow God to intervene, or will you only ask that everything proceed according to your own calculations?

- **For the elderly or those who have walked a long road:**

Leaving may not involve outward action but inner renewal. Life experience is a precious asset, yet it can quietly harden into "fixed traditions" — certain practices, patterns, or values that once provided protection and therefore feel impossible to release. But God's purposes are never about leaving people in yesterday. He often leads them into fresh trust within new circumstances. At this stage, the call may not be dramatic, but it can be deeply demanding: to continue trusting amid change, and not to replace faithfulness with mere preservation of the past.

Genesis 12 reminds us that Abram's call was not based on an "ideal stage of life." When God called him, his life could have settled comfortably — perhaps even reached a point of not wanting further disruption. Yet the call still came, because God desired more than Abram's personal stability. He intended Abram to become the starting point through which God's blessing would re-enter the world.

When we place this passage within the context of Richmond Hill, as we prepare to step into a new five-year journey, what we most need may not be more programs or more refined plans. **What we need first is a deeper order of priorities — to hear once again the call, "Go." Not necessarily to a distant place, but out of self-protection, into God's leading, and toward a greater mission.**

Notes:

*Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1–15, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 275–277.
*Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 118–121.
*Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 150–152.

✍️ **Reflection:**

1. **In your current life or family situation, what are the areas you have been most reluctant to change, yet may actually need to be surrendered back to God?**
2. **If faith is no longer about maintaining the status quo but about following God's leading, what is the most honest resistance you sense within your heart?**

Personal Devotion

PART TWO

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, NIV)

Blessing is Not for Staying in Comfort Zone

If verse 1 draws a person out from old sources of security, verses 2 and 3 place that person into God's greater purpose. The LORD not only tells Abram to "go," but also makes clear **why he is to go — to move in the direction of blessing**.

Yet the emphasis of Genesis 12:2 does not rest simply on "I will bless you," but on the outward-facing turn of the statement: "and you will be a blessing." It is as though the LORD deliberately prevents blessing from becoming the private possession of an individual or a family. **Blessing is not meant to end with a more comfortable life; it is meant to set a person on a path where grace flows outward**.

In Israel's faith, "blessing" is not merely good fortune, smooth circumstances, or external success. Rather, blessing describes a life restored to its place within God's purposes:

- **Direction**, no longer drifting;
- **Relationship**, no longer isolated;
- **Continuity**, allowing life to carry a mission and pass on faith;
- **Order**, freeing a person from having to manufacture significance or reputation for oneself.

In other words, **blessing does not necessarily mean that life becomes easier. More often, it means that life becomes more aligned with God's order**. God draws Abram away from the human impulse of Genesis 11 — to "make a name for ourselves" — and brings him back to receiving a name from God. When the LORD says, "I will make your name great," this is not an encouragement toward self-expansion or a prosperity-driven pursuit of success. Rather, it returns identity into God's hands: You do not need to secure yourself through what you build; God will establish you within His purposes.

The phrase "you will be a blessing" clarifies the true nature of blessing even further: real blessing always moves outward. **When blessing stops with oneself, it easily becomes another Tower of Babel** — a more spiritual, more respectable form of self-protection. From the very beginning, God blocks that path. He blesses Abram so that "all the families of the earth" may be blessed through him.

This also reshapes how we understand the place of family in God's plan. Family is not a secondary or optional unit of faith; it is the vessel through which blessing is carried, sustained, and transmitted. Faith is not lived out only in worship services, but at the dinner table, through conflict and reconciliation, in the growth of children, in the choices of spouses, and in the memories and legacy of older generations. This is why Genesis continues to place such emphasis on families and generations. **God does not call a lone "hero," but works through a covenant family to bring His redemptive purpose into history**.

For Richmond Hill, this serves as a gentle yet piercing reminder. As we speak about a five-year vision — about intergenerational unity, family-centered ministry, outreach, and discipleship growth — if these remain only church-level programs or organizational efforts, we may be busy and sincere, yet still fail to become a true blessing. Only when this calling enters everyday family life — our value priorities, use of time, healing of relationships, and walking together across generations — does blessing begin to flow. It may not be dramatic, but it becomes deeply connected to real life. It may not bear immediate results, but it will endure over time.

What Genesis 12:2–3 ultimately seeks to form is a spiritual orientation:

We leave not merely to find comfort; we are blessed not merely to gain stability; **we build families and churches not simply to preserve what we have — but to stand before God as people who become a blessing to others.**

Notes:
* Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, Genesis: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 204–207.
*John H. Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 136–139.
*T. Desmond Alexander, From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 90–94

✍️ **Reflection:**

1. At this stage of life, does your family focus more on "preserving" and self-protection, or does it still make room for becoming a blessing to others?

2. If blessing involves movement and responsibility, in what ways might God be inviting your family, right now, to bless others?

Personal Devotion

PART THREE

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, NIV)

The Weight of Blessing — Chosen and Entrusted

This verse is often the easiest to misread. When taken out of the broader context of Genesis, it can sound like a kind of spiritual guarantee — as if Abram suddenly became a central figure where "those who take his side benefit, and those who oppose him suffer."

Yet a careful reading of Genesis 12 shows that the focus is not on Abram's privilege, but on how **God chooses to entrust His redemptive plan to a family in real, tangible ways.** "I will bless those who bless you" is not a declaration of Abram's invulnerability; rather, it means that God has chosen to make His purposes visible through a life that has been called.

From that point on, how people respond to this life, this family, and this path of faith becomes, to some extent, a reflection of how they respond to the LORD who calls. For Abram, this is not something light or effortless — it is something that carries weight. Blessing is no longer merely a private experience between him and God; it begins to shape the lives of others, entire communities, and even the course of history. In other words, **to be blessed also means that one's whole life is placed in a position where it will be seen.**

This reveals a crucial spiritual characteristic of blessing in Scripture: **blessing is never merely about being protected; it is about being trusted**. God does not place Abram inside a protective shield; He places His purposes within Abram's life.

For believers today, this dynamic is not unfamiliar. When faith remains personal, it feels safe and private. But when faith truly enters family life and daily living — shaping how time is spent, how money is used, how values are chosen, and how generations relate — family life itself becomes a public witness. Some will be drawn toward faith by such a way of life; others may keep their distance out of misunderstanding; still others may feel challenged or even uncomfortable.

This is precisely the reality revealed in Genesis 12:3: **once blessing becomes a calling, it can no longer remain only "between God and me."** For the church, this is a reminder that takes time to absorb. **If families exist merely as places for believers to retreat into private space and avoid the tensions of the world, blessing easily becomes stagnant.** But when families are willing to bear the weight of faith—imperfect yet honestly lived before God — blessing can quietly flow to the next generation, to neighbors, and to the wider community.

Abram was not called to prove that he was right, but to carry God's purposes. And this very act of carrying is itself an expression of profound trust.

Notes:
*Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 279–281.
*Brueggemann, Genesis, 121–124.
*Scott W. Hahn, Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 37–41.

✍️ **Reflection:**

1. When you think of being "blessed," do you also recognize the responsibility and impact that blessing brings?

2. Has your family life or lifestyle ever, perhaps unintentionally, become a reason for others either to draw closer to faith or to resist it?

Personal Devotion

PART FOUR

"So Abram went, as the LORD had told him …"
"The LORD appeared to Abram … and Abram built an altar there to the LORD …"
(Genesis 12:4–8)

Tents and Altars — Learning to Anchor in Uncertainty

The second half of Genesis 12 does not present a picture of someone who has finally "settled down." Instead, the passage is filled with movement and action: went, took, passed through, set out, pitched tents. This is not the story of a life that has arrived, but of a life still on the journey. Abram's faith is not a one-time act of obedience; it is a response renewed again and again while walking the road.

After leaving Haran, Abram does not immediately receive the land. Scripture even deliberately adds a sobering detail: "At that time the Canaanites were in the land." The promise still lies ahead, while reality remains complex. It is precisely in this unstable and uncertain setting that the text records the same action twice — Abram builds an altar.

In the Old Testament, an altar is not a religious decoration; it is the place where a person reorients life toward God. To build an altar means that **before the outcome is visible, one first acknowledges: this journey is not self-directed, but lived before God**.

It is also worth noticing where Abram builds these altars — one at Shechem, and another between Bethel and Ai — neither of which "belonged" to him yet. The land is still occupied, and the future remains unclear, yet **Abram chooses to make space for God before his life becomes secure**.

At the same time, Scripture also mentions tents. Tents symbolize impermanence, movement, and incompleteness. Abram does not build a city for himself, but he builds altars for God. He allows his living situation to remain temporary, while ensuring that God remains the stable center of his life. This contrast lays an important foundation for the Bible's later "theology of the family." **True stability does not come from first arranging everything and then inviting God in; rather, it comes from placing God at the center while still on the move, still uncertain** — out of which family and relationships are gradually shaped.

For many believers today, this picture feels familiar. Some are rebuilding family rhythms; others are navigating changes in ministry roles; still others, as they grow older, are learning to trust God even when they no longer control everything.

Genesis 12 reminds us that **calling does not bring people to a final destination; it invites them into a way of walking by faith**. Abram does not wait until the promise is fully realized before he worships. Along the journey, he already anchors his life in God. And this anchoring becomes the foundation upon which family, descendants, and generations are later formed.

Notes:
**Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 152–155.*
**Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative, 137–140.*
**Alexander, From Eden to the New Jerusalem, 94–97.*

✍️ **Reflection:**

1. Is your current season of life still, in some way, a "tent-dwelling" season? How do you respond to the uncertainty it brings?

2. If "building an altar" represents making space for God at the center, what is the one thing you most need to realign right now?

Group Discussion

[Please read Genesis 12:1-8]

Introductory Questions (Observation)

1. **In Genesis 12:1–8, which phrase or action stands out to you the most? Why?**

2. **The passage repeatedly uses verbs such as "go," "leave," and "set out." What kind of rhythm or feeling do these actions create for you?**

Deeper Questions (Interpretation)

3. **Why do you think the LORD did not clearly explain the destination or the outcome when He called Abram? What does this way of calling reveal about the nature of faith?**

4. **The passage speaks of a threefold "leaving" (country, people, and father's household). Is this merely a physical relocation, or do you think it points to something deeper? If so, what?**

5. **Genesis 12 links "being blessed" with "becoming a blessing to others." How does this reshape our understanding of blessing as more than just personal benefit?**

Application Questions (Reflection and Action)

6. **In your current stage of life or family situation, is there an area where the LORD may be inviting you to "step forward," rather than simply maintain the status quo?**

7. **If the family is a place where calling and blessing are carried and lived out, what is one concrete action you can take this week to respond to that calling?**

Conclusion

Genesis 12 does not end with completion, but with a family still on the journey — marking the beginning of a new chapter in God's redemptive story.

Abram has not yet received the land, yet he has already built altars; he has not yet seen descendants, yet he has already set out on the journey. **The starting point of faith is often not "finally settling down," but choosing to trust and move forward even when everything is not yet clear.**

May this month's Scripture help us rediscover that the family is not the endpoint of faith, but the place where God's gracious calling first takes shape in everyday life.

Note: Depending on your group's situation, the leader may also choose reflection questions from pages 1–7 that best suit the group's needs.