

C Proper14	<p style="text-align: center;">Ancestors & Descendants Galore</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Genesis 12.1-2, 15.1-6; Hebrews 11.8-16; Galatians 3.6-7, 26-29, Deuteronomy 11.1-21</p> <p style="text-align: center;">by Tim Isbell</p>	8/11/2019 at New Life Cupertino
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Thesis: God invites us to a place at the table in his everlasting household, populated with our uncountable spiritual ancestors and descendants.

Intro

Over the past few weeks, the Lord has used scripture to expand my thinking about descendants in order to share it with you today. And I will use Robin's framework to do so: What? So What? Now what?

What?

Rather than take the time to read all these verses, I'll just give you Tim's paraphrase that lifts up the parts important for what the Lord gave me for today.

Genesis 12.1-2; 15.1-6 (from today's Revised Common Lectionary)

God: Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to a land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and your life will bless others.

Some time later Abraham was again with God...

Abram: How can you make me into a great nation? I don't have any children!

God: Look up into the sky and count the stars. That's how many descendants you will have.

Abram: "But my wife and I are old and we don't even have one descendant!"

God: "You will have a son of your own who will be your heir." Then the Lord took Abraham outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"

Bible: Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith. So, from the start, God's promise was about more than bloodlines; it was about faith in in him.

Heb 11.8-16 reaffirms that it was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He didn't know where God would lead him. And even when he reached that land, he lived like a foreigner. Even so, Abraham looked forward to a city with eternal foundations, designed and built by God.

It was by faith that Sarah had a child, though she was barren and far too old. And so a whole nation came from this couple who were as good as dead - a nation with so many people that,

like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

Abraham, Sarah, and all the others on this Hebrews 11 “Faith Hall of Fame” list died still believing what God had promised them. In their lifetimes, none of them received what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They all lived as foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously were looking forward to a home they can call their own. Many of them could have gone back from where they came. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared an Eternal Household for them.

[Galatians 3.6-7, 26-29](#) says, yet again, that “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham are those who put their faith in God.

Later in the chapter, Paul writes to his readers - and to us, “For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you.”

The What in a nutshell: Throughout the Old Testament, God’s household was almost exclusively defined by the bloodline of Abraham and Sarah, later this biological family grew to be known as the nation of Israel. Still later in the Old Testament, after some pruning, it became known as the Jewish nation. But from the beginning, God intended his real household to be filled not primarily with a bloodline but with every person anywhere who would put their faith in him through trusting and following Jesus.

So what?

So What 1: Charles and Roma Gates

I wish I had a decent snapshot of this couple. Carl was born in Canton, Ohio in 1929. His wife, Roma, was born in Wooster, Ohio in 1930. They had one son, Greg. I had breakfast with him two Fridays ago. Greg is the lead pastor at The Point. Pastor Chris and I had breakfast with him two weeks ago. Greg’s dad is dying of cancer so we talked a little about his and Roma’s life.

After college Charles & Roma went into the ministry and in September 1958, when they were about 30 years old, they disembarked to become two of the first four Nazarene missionaries in Brazil where they would serve until 2000. After that, they served the Lord in other roles, mostly in the States.

In Brazil they gathered a tiny group of Brazilian nationals and began nurturing that group into what is now the COTN in Brazil. Anyone want to guess how many members of the COTN live in Brazil today? (190,000). Two missionary couples heard God’s call to leave home and follow him. Charles and Roma had one natural descendant. Today they have innumerable spiritual descendants.

Robin and I don’t expect that many descendants will join us when we sit down at the Lord’s table in his Eternal Household. Nobody will be counting anyway. We’ll just be celebrating eternal life together with you and many other of our spiritual descendants. Some of them we’ll have had

a pretty big role in shaping, others' our role will have been much smaller. But there will deep joy in gathering at the Lord's table.

Not only will our spiritual descendants be at that table, so will our spiritual ancestors... all the way back to Abraham and Sarah.

Notice that I am not talking about the people we may have helped cross the line of faith in Jesus. The evangelism component of our descendants is only a tiny sliver of our spiritual descendants - these will include all who we nurtured somewhere along their journey of faith.

That's one So What? Here's another:

So What 2: Encouragement for the childless

Have you ever noticed how common it is in churches for "childless" people nurture others in Christian faith and life in general? Sometimes they take on roles much like parents or uncles or aunts. Other times they take on roles like adult children, nieces, or nephews as they nurture and care for the elderly. Some of you take on such roles, and for that I hold you in high esteem.

They may have been childless themselves, or they may have had children who are off on their own someplace. But these "childless" adults are far from "childless." Most likely, you never thought of these people as your spiritual descendants - but they are.

I've seen this dynamic play out in every church I've ever been in. I'm confident that God designed it just that way - precisely so that we all will be surrounded by some spiritual descendants in his Eternal Household.

In the past couple of weeks, I noticed that there are examples of this throughout the Bible. For example, the prophet Daniel never had natural children, the Apostle Paul, and even Jesus. But think of their innumerable spiritual descendants! How elegant and beautiful is the Lord's Way!

Let's move on to the last What.

Now what?

Now What 1: Accept living in the “meantime”

What was true for Abraham and the Apostle Paul is true for us: God has an “End Game” and he made it clear in scripture: The Eternal Household that God whispered into Abraham and Sarah’s world will come sometime after Jesus returns. Our job is to live faithfully in the “meantime.”

So What 2: Testify to those coming after us you of our experiences with God

Sure, we older folks need to teach the younger folks God’s story and his precepts so they’ll know how God designed them to live. But these are mostly teachings aimed at the head.

We older folks especially need to testify to our experiences with God - how he redeemed us from sin and carried us through failure and hard times. These are what our love for God is based on. The younger folks don’t yet have many experiences, maybe none! Eventually, they’ll have their own stories, but the Lord uses ours’ to get them started. (See “The Power of Testimony” link in the Other Resources section below.)

Now What 3: Get to know someone who is deeply in awe and in love with God

If you haven’t yet been astounded by the beauty and elegance of God and his ways, if you haven’t yet fallen passionately in love with God, look around for someone you respect who you think may have experienced God personally and get to know them.

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Slides . (Similar to PowerPoint)
Sermon audio link available here.
For more on this subject, check out this link to an early draft of “Descendants Galore” and “The Power of Testimony” .
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