

“Believe Big and Multiply” // Genesis 18:16–33 // Multiply #5

Well, SC at all campuses, this is going to be an **awesome weekend**...

There are certain moments that define us and shape the trajectory of our lives. In one of my favorite scenes from **National Treasure**, which stars the greatest actor of our generation, Nicolas Cage, Cage’s character, **Benjamin Gates**, sneaks into this bigwig party celebrating the Declaration of Independence. He is called on to make a toast, and without skipping a beat he says:

*"To high treason! That's what these men were committing when they signed this Declaration of Independence. Had we lost the war, which seemed likely, they would have been hanged, beheaded, drawn and quartered, and... oh! My personal favorite—would have had their entrails cut out and **burned**. So, here's to the men who did what was considered wrong, in order to do what they knew was right."*

It’s pretty staggering to think about the **magnitude of that moment**. What if they had **faltered** in courage? What if they’d taken the **safe route**? **Our history as a nation** would have turned out very differently. We’d all **still be driving on the left side** of the road and stopping every afternoon at 4 for tea. That moment was a defining moment for us as a nation.

Almost 14 years ago this church had a defining moment. **300 of us made a decision** to prioritize the reaching of people far from God over our personal church preferences, and to follow the Holy Spirit wherever he led us regardless of what it cost. That defining decision has led to **9000 of us gathered** here this weekend in 9 different campuses across the Triangle, with 115 church plants gathered

around the world this weekend, whose attendance collectively is greater than the 9000 we have gathered here.

I share all that because today will be a defining moment for many of you as individuals, as well as for us as a church.

- **Many of you today are going to commit to re-order your life according to God’s priorities**, and that is so exciting.
- Today is going to **define our future as a church**, taking us into new, unprecedented opportunities for ministry.
- And what we do today is going to change the shape of the Triangle for decades to come.

Those of you who think of this church as “your” church are going to be asked to **fill out this CARD**... Where we are going to **commit ourselves** to this defining moment.

- I’m **really excited** because of how momentous it all is.
- **If you are our guest today, you picked an awesome day to come.** I’m serious about that. **Because you get to hear today** what we are all about as a church and where we believe God is taking us, and I’m glad for that.
- I certainly **don’t want you to feel like** you are under any kind of obligation, but **we would love for you one day to** join up with us in this mission. Maybe this weekend will begin that journey for you!

Genesis 18:16–33

Here’s the story: *3 mysterious men have come down to talk with Abraham.* They have **two purposes** for their visit: ONE, they want to announce to Sarah, Abraham’s wife, that she’s pregnant; TWO, they intend to destroy two very wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. S and G were **notorious not only for their moral lasciviousness**, but for their **cruelty** and their **oppression of the poor**.

So the 3 men meet with Abraham and Sarah and announce Sarah's pregnancy. Task 1, the happy part of their journey, has been completed.

18:16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way.
17 Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" *Real quick: Who are these mysterious men?* Well, at least one of them is God himself, because he speaks in the first person. We assume the other two are angels.

The one that is God says, 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him... so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

So they tell Abraham what they are going to do and then, 22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. If you remember, Lot, Abraham's nephew, lives in Sodom. So we assume that he is thinking here about his nephew and that he doesn't want him to be destroyed. So...

23 Then Abraham approached him (This word "approach" in Hebrew is a technical word that means "approaching" the bench as in a court of law. In other words, Abraham is about to go to court with God) and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26 The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord... 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" In other words, "Well... what if there are only 45? Surely that 5 wouldn't make the difference between destruction and salvation?" *Abraham is haggling with God... like you'd haggle over the price of bananas at a street fair in Mexico.*

God plays along. "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." 29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry... What if only thirty can be found there?" "Here 30; Let me hear 30. Who's got 30? Anybody for 30? Give me 30, give me 30."

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home. What happened? Why did he stop with 10?

I find 2 intriguing questions in this passage:

First: *Why is Abraham praying for the city in the first place?*

I used to think he was simply doing it for the sake of his nephew Lot: to keep God from destroying the city so Lot wouldn't be harmed.

But Abraham could have just asked for *that* directly. (He could have said, "Hey God, I know you need to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, but

could you give me some time to get Lot out first? Then you can pelt those disgusting Canaanites with heavenly road tar and get rid of them for good."

That would have been much easier; and honestly, it would have made sense, because not only were the people of Sodom really wicked, they had been **especially unkind to Abraham** personally. Remember, they were ones who kidnapped Lot and made war on Abraham.

But **instead of doing that**, Abraham stood before God and asked for mercy for the whole city. **He even puts himself at risk** in doing so.

- Notice how he keeps saying, **"God, don't be mad."** He knows he is pushing it with God, putting himself on the line for them.
- This would be something like the **families of the victims in the Paris tragedy** praying for God to withhold judgment from the ISIS killers.

Why is Abraham doing this? Because Abraham understands that God has chosen him to be a channel of blessing and mercy to the nations.

See what God says in vs. 18? *"I have chosen Abraham... so that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through him."* 18:17–18? In other words (so important), **God shared his plan with Abraham so that he could ask for them to be blessed instead of destroyed.** And Abraham understood that. So he rose up to fulfill his destiny.

You say, "But they had been unkind to Abraham, and they didn't deserve that blessing or Abraham's mercy." Yes, but Abraham understood that *he had been unkind* to God, and didn't deserve blessing either, but God had blessed him anyway, even though he failed God time and time again.

So now it just makes sense that he ask for a similar mercy to be shown to Sodom and Gomorrah.

- **(I say that, "it makes sense..."** It doesn't make sense unless you see yourself as the recipient of great grace. But when you do see

yourself as a recipient of unfathomable grace, you instinctively develop a desire to see it extended to others.)

Second: Why does Abraham stop the negotiations at 10?

As far as negotiations go, Abraham seems to have been on a roll. He has gotten God down **from 50 righteous to 10**. So why stop there? Any negotiator knows that when you sense an opening, you press as far as you can to find the lowest price.

- **If your friend is selling his 2-year-old Mercedes**, which you know is worth \$50,000, and you go to him and say, "Hey, would you take \$10,000 for it?" and he says, "I would gladly give it to you for 10K!" then you should follow up with, "Well, since you were so enthusiastic about that, how about \$5K?" If he says, "\$5K sounds great." "Would you take \$1K?" "Yes, of course." Then you say, "Why don't you pay *me* to take this car off your hands?" That's intuitive for the negotiator.

So why didn't Abraham do that? Why doesn't he haggle God down to ONE righteous person?

Evidently, he recognized that there was not even one in the city righteous enough to have the city spared. So he leaves off the negotiation, and Sodom is destroyed.

As a favor to Abraham, God warns Abraham's nephew, Lot, first, so that he and his two daughters can get out, but he then pours out fire and brimstone on Sodom.

Don't you see? This story leaves a question that only the New Testament will answer. *Is there no one who righteous enough who can plead on behalf of the wicked earth, and stay the wrath of God on our behalf?*

- **Islamic Ka'aba story...** Jesus is that *one*.
- **750 years** before Jesus' birth, Isaiah foretold, in great detail, the horrors of the cross that the Messiah would suffer upon, and

concludes by saying, **Isaiah 53:11**, “God will see the suffering of his soul and be satisfied.”

- **Jesus’ righteousness was so great**, and his sacrifice so immensely satisfying to God, that **on Jesus’ behalf we can ask for forgiveness for our own sins**, and God will give it to us.
- And, we can plead for him to extend his mercy to even the most wicked of sinners, and he will be disposed to hear it.

For us: You and I have been placed in a similar situation to Abraham

1. Each of us is placed into a community to pray and sacrifice on its behalf.

God placed you into that family; into that community, so that you could ask for blessing and mercy there. That was his intention in putting you where he did.

- **In Acts 17:26**, Paul explains that that God pre-determined “the allotted periods and the boundaries of people’ dwelling places, so that they might learn to seek God.” In other words, *God sovereignly arranges where people live so they might seek him.*
 - **My neighbors think they just moved here to get a job with SAS**, but I know God brought them down here to the Triangle and moved them into my neighborhood because he wanted them to hear about Jesus. He was seeking them. They don’t know that, but that’s what Acts 17:26 says.
 - **Do you see your neighbors that way?** Are you praying for them to that end?
 - **I often think of that when I sit down on a plane.** “Of all the people I *could have sat down next to*, God had me sit next to you. God must be seeking you, since he determined beforehand our allotted periods and the boundaries of our dwelling, which includes the seat you

occupy on the plane.” *I usually don’t say that to them first thing*, but I think it is true.

- God placed you in that family, that community, that airplane seat, to pray and give and sacrifice on their behalf!
- **Summit Church: This why God placed us into *this* community. It is our divine destiny. He put us here to bless the Triangle. Our placement here is proof that he wants to extend mercy to them. God is always looking for someone.**

*That means **we owe them our labors** and faith and sacrifices on their behalf. It’s **not that they deserve it**, or that we are obligated to them personally, any more than Sodom deserved Abraham’s grace. **We owe it to Jesus.***

- **Romans 1:14**, Paul called himself a “debtor” to all those who have never heard the gospel.
 - **Debtor?** What did Paul owe them? He’d never even met most of them.
 - **Well, see, there are two ways you can be a debtor.** *The first way:* somebody loans you money, and so you owe them. But there’s another way: You are dead broke and hopeless and somebody generously pours out riches upon you, more than you could ever use in your lifetime, and then says to you, “My only requirement is that you share this with others whom you encounter who are similarly destitute.” At that point you owe your wealth to others, not because of them, but your benefactor.
 - **That’s the kind of debt Paul is talking about.**
 - **Paul knew that for no reason at all**, God had chosen him to be blessed by the gospel. **Paul wasn’t more worthy** than other sinners. He didn’t have more potential. It was pure grace.
 - **And that meant he owed something to people who had not heard**, who were no more unworthy than he was.
- **That’s how we are.** No special reason about us why God saved us... he did it from pure grace.

- God didn't **save you because of something about you**— oh, that one is special. She has potential; her sin is not that bad.
- **No, we were Sodom in this story**, and Jesus interceded for us. He asked God not just to spare the wicked because of the presence of the righteous, but because he, the righteous, voluntarily died in the place of us, the wicked.
- And **because God answered his prayer for us**, we owe our efforts and our generosity to everyone else.
- **"Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every unsaved person this side of hell." David Platt**
- **Your life looks different when you're a debtor.** If you are past due on a debt to the credit card company for \$100K, then if you get an extra \$5000, you can't be looking to upgrade your wardrobe or take a vacation. Your obligation to them trumps your freedom.
- **We, Summit Church, because we are under obligation** to the Triangle and the unreached cities and people groups in the world... **our lives and out ministries should look different.**
 - As I've told you throughout this series, the question is no longer, **"How much do I have to give?"** but "what am I not giving and why?"
 - Because I am under obligation
- **I heard a S. African pastor** say that the mission statement of his church was simply, *"People without Jesus go to hell."* What more needs to be said?

2. We can pray and give *expectantly* because of the worthy sacrifice of Jesus.

- **Unlike Abraham, we know that THERE IS ONE** counted righteous enough to spare the city, no matter how wicked, on his behalf, **because the righteous died in the place**, and he commands us to ask now boldly in his name, and that when we do, the Father promises, has to, hear it.
- **Psalm 2:8**, "Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession." **ONE OF THOSE PROMISES** we pray back to God...

- **Do you realize the potential that God has placed in our hands?**
 - We have One so worthy that on his behalf God will extend mercy to our neighbors and our city!
- God made a promise that the sons of Abraham would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and we can ask with confidence because Jesus died to bring that completion to fulfillment.
 - When I was discouraged overseas: **Gen 15, stars in the sky!**
- **I have great optimism about our future here.** *A lot of Christians seem to talk about the future like they are discouraged.* "Oh, we've lost the culture. And the world is getting more closed to missions..." **Jesus has a promise to fulfill... he died not so a group of scared Christians could huddle together and hang on until the rapture, or so we could play church, but so that we could go boldly in his name until every people in every place had a thriving witness to the gospel.** He told us the gates of hell could not keep us out.
- A verse that has guided this church for the last couple of years: **"Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: "Do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal; or cross over to Beersheba... Seek the Lord and live!" Amos 5:4-6**
 - **Told you before... why the random list of cities? Bethel** is where Jacob had his life-changing encounter with God, a place that symbolized for Israelites awakening and renewal.
 - **Gilgal** was where the children of Israel finally emerged from their 40 year wandering in the wilderness, believed God, and took possession of the Promised Land. God miraculously parted the Jordan at Gilgal he *"rolled away their reproach"* (Joshua 5:9).
 - At **Beerhseba**, God delivered by Abraham by giving him a treaty with Abimelech that became instrumental in his possession of the new land. His son Isaac would make an altar there.
 - Each of these represents a **place of incredible spiritual power** But **Israel had fallen into the trap** of thinking about God's mighty movements as a thing of the past. So God says to

them, “Do not seek me there. Seek me *now* and live...” In other words, “My saving acts are not simply a thing of the past; seek them in the present.”

- *Us today... shut up about the Reformation; the Great Awakening; Billy Graham...*
- **We live in a world 6400 UPG’s!** The greatest days of spiritual outpouring have to be ahead of us.

So I repeat: God put us here at this time, for this purpose! To reach, to raise up leaders, and multiply all over the world with the gospel! Our success is as sure as the stars come out every night.

We need to ask and dream big, because Jesus sacrifice for our world demands that we do.

- John Newton, **story of Alexander**. God loves when we ask big prayers, like the salvation of Sodom, on Jesus’ behalf, because in asking big we are honoring the size of God’s grace demonstrated in Jesus’ sacrifice.
- Newton wrote another hymn that we never sing because the tune is goofy: “*Thou art coming to a King, so with thee large petitions bring; for his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much!*”
- **GET THIS: God even invites us to haggle with him;** to plead Jesus’ merits at the bench of his throne room. To put before him that ONE name that God cannot turn down.
 - **Psalm 2:8**, “Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.”
 - **Isaiah 53:11**, “God will see the suffering of his soul and be satisfied.”
 - **Whatever you ask in my name**, he told his disciples in Matthew 21:22, I will do.
 - **Thou art coming to a King...**
- **QUESTION:** *Who is that one person, one family, one community, one nation, that if you took this promise seriously, you would pray for? Who is that one family for which Multiply is all about for you?*

Summit Church, **what we are doing in this season matters**. It matters because by believing God we change **the eternities of people** in this community and across the world. *Think about that*. What we’re going to do will change eternities!

- Because Abraham **followed**, you are here.
 - *Who will point to you and say, “Because he or she followed...”*
- Because Abraham **trusted God**, you are here.
 - *Who will point to you and say, “Because they **trusted God...**”*
- Because Abraham **prioritized God**, surrendered, believed God for big things?
 - *Who will point to you and say, “Because they **prioritized God...**” **gave it all...**”_Because he or she **believed God...**”*

(CARD/VIDEO)

Which leads us to this CARD. This card is **an expression of our offering** ourselves to God, **like Abraham—our whole selves**, to be multiplied...

- **On weeks 1, 2 and 3** we had you turn in cards about getting involved in community, mission, and serving.
- This week, it is how you are financially committing to TSC.

There have been a lot of us who have already gone before.

A couple of Fridays ago, we gathered together our leaders and volunteers for our Advance Commitment Night, and I don’t know if you know this but when David built the temple back in **1 Chronicles 29**, the kings and priests and leaders went **FIRST**. And so many of our leaders from The Summit Church across all campuses gathered together in worship and prayer to make our commitments **FIRST** prior to the rest of us doing it this weekend. **Let me tell you, I cannot believe the level of sacrifice** from our leaders. I want to share a couple of things with you:

- **That night, we had 81 families** from The Summit Church who made a commitment to give for the very first time. **81 families!** Could we give God a hand for this level of faith?! There may be some of you like those 81. I'd venture to guess there are probably hundreds of you - that today you will be taking a step of faith you have never taken before and that is to trust God with your finances in a way you never have before and 81 families went before.
- I also want to share that we had **16 families from The Summit Church step out with a 6- or 7-figure gift.** 16 families! For some of you, that's what your first and best means. And I want you to know that these men and women have gone first for you to pave the way. I invite you to join them.
- ALL TOTAL, we had **488 total households commit** that night. And I need to tell you that these 488 commitments represent some amazing steps of faith for people.
 - **One young professional who only gave \$20** over the past two years committed \$7,200 to the mission of God here at The Summit Church;
 - there was **one family** that went from 10K to 50K.
- **I am telling you, Summit Church, this is a moment where God is getting ready to do something BIG!**
- We are praying that **100% of us will take this step** with him. **The primary goal is that 100%** of us participate, because ultimately this is as much about what God wants to do in us as what he wants to do through us.

I want to show you just a few snapshots of what is going on in these people's hearts. It's not about the number; it's about what's going on in your heart BEHIND the number. **Check these stories out... VIDEO**

Now, we beckon you to join... Again, our primary goal is 100% of you would have a life-changing encounter...

A few mechanics (as you take out card) –

- The point is not **filling out all of the blanks.** They are just a **worksheet** for you if you need it. **The only thing really important is the number at the bottom.** That is your commitment of your **TOTAL generosity** to The Summit Church over **the next TWO YEARS.**
- **This is total giving...**
 - You include your TWO YEAR REGULAR GIVING to the **SUMMIT CHURCH** in your number PLUS your extra step of faith for Multiply so that this card reflects your TOTAL giving, not just the extra.
- **Stored assets; 5 MOST EXPENSIVE:** *Are there any of these the Holy Spirit will move you to release from an earthly investment to a heavenly one?*
 - **1 family and young professional** that re-evaluated their housing situation
 - **We've had people** sell cars, and one guy sell a mountain bike

Whatever it is, this card should represent your first and best—like Abel, we are going to give God the first and best of what he's giving to us, trusting him to provide what comes after.

It should represent your acknowledgement that, like Abraham, we see the resources of our lives as seed God has **given to us to multiply** for his kingdom.

- You see, **and I'll explain this one more time,** when you see your life that way, the question goes from "How much do I have to give?" and becomes **"What am I not giving and why?"** Because you understand, like Abraham, that every resource God gave me is GIVEN to you for a purpose; **seed to be sown for the growth his kingdom;** so the question is **What am I not giving and why?**
- *God, of course, wants me to live on some of what he gives to me... but the main reason he gave me what he gave me is to invest it for his kingdom. **Time, treasure, talent***

- **So my question is, “What am I not giving, and why am I not giving it?”**

And, it represents **total surrender of all things in your life to God. So no one else’s standard is yours. This is between you and God.**

- 1) For **some of you, this is the first time you’ll ever be committing** to give to the Summit Church. And I am so happy for you, and you are taking steps of faith in honoring God with this area of your life.
- 2) For **others, you are choosing to NO LONGER give out of your excess.** You may have even been tithing for years, but today you are deciding that **God gets your first and best** and that you see what he’s giving you as seed to be multiplied for his kingdom. And for some of you, that means something far beyond the tithe. For some, it might mean a 6 or 7 figure commitment, and I want to encourage you toward that.
- 3) **Are you hung up on the word “commitment?”**
 - I have variable income? Maybe I will move? I might lose my job.
 - This is not a **contract.** It is your FAITH **commitment about what you are going to shoot for, and what you are going to make your priority** for as long as you are able.
 - **But I want to challenge you...** you commit to other things. You should **commit yourself** to this. You need to go forward in faith. Saying, God, you are priority, and I’m going to trust you to enable me to fulfill this!

It is my prayer that every single person in this room, as you look down at your card, you know that for you this is what sacrificial generosity looks like for you and that this commitment reflects your obedience to the promptings of God’s Spirit.

Again, are you a guest with us? We don’t want you to feel like we are asking this of you, but we do hope you can see what we are all about, and we’d love to see you join us in this mission.

Prayer/Reflection Moment

- The band is going to play, and we’re going to give you a few moments to **think, pray, and write.**
 - **If you are married** and here with your spouse, feel free to **talk if over with them...**
- In a minute, I’ll **come back up and give you more instructions,** but take this time to pray and fill out the card

2–3 Min Writing/Band

Commitment Moment...

- Our worship team is going to begin playing our final worship set, and when you’re ready, come forward and drop your **card in these [baskets]...**
- Then **go back to your seat,** as we worship with a couple of final songs

(Worship starts) As we stand, if you are still filling out the card... take whatever time you need. **“COME WHEN YOU ARE READY”**

Our worship teams come now