

New Beginnings

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Genesis 8, 9

I've been doing a series from the book of Genesis that I've called Roots. I have said over and over again that the early chapters of Genesis deal with all of the basic questions that we deal with in life. We want to know about where we came from. What does it mean to be made a human being? We want to know about our sexuality. What does it mean to be a male or female? We want to know about why things are so messed up and screwed up. What's wrong with the world?

Genesis gives an answer to that. Genesis deals with the questions of violence that we see in our culture. Why is there so much violence? And why is there so much division in America? The divisions that have been exposed through this whole torturous election process. Genesis 4 talks to us about division – brother against brother, person against person.

Today we are going to take a look at what a man or woman does when their world is destroyed. We are specifically looking at the story of Noah. A few weeks ago I began to look at the story of Noah and God's decision to flood the world with water. But we are going to pick up the story today with the aftermath of the flood as Noah is going to be called out of the ark to a world that has been destroyed.

Here is a basic question: what do you do when your world is shattered? When the nice little life that you have built for yourself comes tumbling down?

On February 13 and 14 in 1945 nearly 250 English bombers dropped fire bombs on the German city of Dresden. Nearly 500 English and Canadian bombers came back about three hours later to finish the task. Dresden was unable to defend itself. The German Luftwaffe was virtually out of commission by this point in the war. Dresden also had no military importance. The fire bombing of Dresden that was recorded in Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse 5" was an act of sheer revenge. It was British and Canadian retaliation for the German bombing of London and other English cities in the early days of the war.

The concentration of fire bombs unleashed a mammoth fire storm that destroyed most of Dresden. Dresden was a very beautiful baroque city that had a wonderful church in its center. Once the fires began, they were virtually impossible to put out. Dresden burned for seven days and about 12,000 buildings were destroyed. The flames could be seen 70 miles away. It is impossible to know how many people died. The estimates vary from as few as 35,000 to as many as 350,000.

The day that Dresden was bombed was Carnival Day. What we would call here Mardi Gras, which is the start of the season of Lent, before Easter. And many of the children that were found burned were in their little carnival costumes dressed as Indians and clowns.

I want to read to you an eyewitness account written some years after the war by a man who experienced the Dresden fire bombing as a 9-year old. He says:

“It was February 13, 1945. I lived with my mother and sisters. I had a sister who was 13, another who was 5, and two 5-month old twins in Dresden. I was looking forward to celebrating my 10th birthday, which was coming up on Feb. 16th. My father was a carpenter who had been a soldier since 1939 and we got his last letter in August of 1944. My mother was very sad to receive her letters back with a note, “Not to be found.”

We lived in a 3-room flat on the 4th floor in a working class region of our town. I remember celebrating Shrove Tuesday, Mardi Gras, together with the other children. The activities of the war in the East came nearer and nearer. Lots of soldiers went east to fight and the refugees were going west through our town.

About 9:30 p.m. on Feb. 13th the alarm was given. We children knew that sound and got up and dressed quickly to hurry downstairs into our cellar which we used as an air raid shelter. My older sister and I carried my baby twin sisters. My mother carried a little suitcase with bottles of milk for the babies. On the radio we heard with great horror the news ‘Attention – a great air raid will come over our town!’ This means I will never forget.

Some minutes later we heard a horrible noise – the bombers. There were non-stop explosions. Our cellar was filled with fire and smoke and was damaged. The lights went out and wounded people shouted dreadfully. In great fear we struggled to leave this cellar. My mother and my older sister carried the big basket in which the twins were laying. With one hand I grabbed my younger sister and with the other hand I grasped the coat of my mother. We did not recognize our street anymore. Fire, only fire, wherever we looked.

Our fourth floor did not exist anymore. The broken remains of our house were burning. On the streets there were burning vehicles and carts with refugees, people, horses – all of them screaming and shouting in fear of death. I saw hurt women, children, old people searching their way through the ruins and flames. We fled into another cellar overcrowded already with injured and distraught men, women and children shouting, crying and praying. No light except some electric torches.

And then suddenly the second raid began. This shelter was hit too. And so we fled from one cellar to another. Many, so many desperate people came in from the streets. It is not possible to describe. Explosion after explosion was beyond

belief – worse than the blackest nightmare. So many people were horribly burnt and injured; it became more and more difficult to breathe. It was dark and all of us tried to leave this cellar with inconceivable panic. Dead and dying people were trampled upon. Luggage was left and snatched out of our hands by rescuers. The basket with our twins, covered with wet cloth, was snatched up out of my mother's hands and we were pushed upstairs by the people behind us.

We saw the burning street, the fallen ruins, and the terrible firestorm. My mother covered us with wet blankets and coats she found in a water tub. I cannot forget these terrible details. I cannot forget them. Now my mother possessed only a little bag with our identity papers. The basket with the twins had disappeared and then suddenly my oldest sister vanished too. Although my mother looked for them immediately, it was in vain. The last hours of this night we found shelter in the cellar of a hospital nearby surrounded by crying and dying people.

The next morning we went to look for our sister and the twins, but without success. The house where we lived was only a burning ruin. The house where our twins were left we could not go in. Soldiers said everyone was burnt to death and we never saw my two baby sisters again.

In the next days and weeks we looked for my older sister, but in vain. We wrote our present address on the last walls of our damaged house. In the middle of March we were evacuated to a little village near Oschatz and on March 31st we got a letter from my sister. She was alive. In that disastrous night she lost us and with other lost children she was taken to a nearby village. Later she found our address on the wall of our house and at the beginning of April our mother brought her to our new home.

In all the tragedy, I had completely forgotten my 10th birthday. The next day my mother surprised me with a piece of sausage she begged from the Red Cross. This was my birthday present.

A world destroyed. Everything burnt out. Everything bombed. In the decades following the war, many European monuments were rebuilt and restored, but Dresden was trapped in East Germany and there was no money for restoring the historic city. Ugly Soviet-era buildings were built. In the middle of the town there was a historic baroque church that in German was called Fraunkirche – the Church of our Lady. And it was preserved in ruins as a monument to the war for 50 years.

But in the 1990's, after German reunification, people in Dresden decided that they were going to try to rebuild their church. IBM got involved and they did these computerized 3-D configurations of all the different stone and rubble that was photographed. They are using the original stones. They are all numbered and put on scaffolding. They are using the original stones and blocks to rebuild

this gorgeous church – a church that had a world-famous pipe organ in it that Johann Sabastian Bach used to play.

I love stories of restoration. It is one thing to create, but it seems a special grace of God to recreate, to bring out of the ashes a restored church or restored marriage or restored life. I love the fact that God is in the business not only of creating, but of recreating, of restoring, and of offering a new beginning to people whose worlds have been destroyed, as the Dresdener's world was destroyed.

As we look again at the story of Noah today, we are going to be examining the life of a person whose world was destroyed and who experienced a new beginning with God. Let's pray.

In Genesis 7:17 it says: **For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than 20 feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished – birds, livestock, wild animals – all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind, everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out – man and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for 150 days.**

Genesis 8:13 – By the first day of the first month of Noah's 601st year the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the 27th day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

What did Noah see when he looked out at the world? When the cover on the ark was taken off and Noah got to look out at the world, what did he see?

He saw emptiness. There weren't any birds flying in the air. There were no squirrels running after each other in the trees. There was no laundry blowing in the breeze. He saw emptiness. He saw devastation. He saw a world that was like Dresden after the fire bombing. Like a vast uninhabited stretch of the moon. There is Noah, like a spaceman, coming down in his ship on the surface of the moon, and he looks through the window and there is nothing. No one is outside of the ark haggling in the marketplace over the price of vegetables or a rug or pair of shoes. There are no kids outside chasing each other, playing tag or singing songs. There was no pair of lovers sitting under a tree snuggling or kissing. There is nothing.

No sights. No sounds. Just lots of mud covering the trees, the bushes, the rocks – mud and more mud.

Have you ever been somewhere where you saw no signs of life in any direction? Maybe you have been out in a desert. Some of you may have had the opportunity to travel to North Africa and you went out in the desert. Or maybe you have traveled across Death Valley in California. Some of you might have been in the Navy and you had an opportunity to be on the high seas and you looked out and there was nothing. All around the horizon – nothing, just water. I don't imagine that anyone here has been to Antarctica or even, perhaps, to Siberia. Maybe some of you have. But there are places on the earth that when you look out, you see nothing, you hear nothing.

I remember when I was 18. I drove across America with a friend from college. We stopped somewhere in Nebraska. We were going along Highway 80 and we just pulled the car off the highway. There was no one in front of us, no one in back of us – just a ribbon of road as far as you could see. We just pulled the car off to the side and I scanned the horizon 360°. There were no houses. There were no cars. There were no tractors. There was just corn. As far as you could see there was just corn. Nothing – no sign of human life, no wires, no telephone poles.

Surely, some of you at some point in your life have looked out at your world and saw nothing. No future for your marriage. No possibilities. No reason to go on. No hope. Surely some of you, at some point, have looked out at your world and saw only devastation. Maybe you went through a divorce or you discovered an affair. Maybe you lost a child. Maybe you suffered another miscarriage. Some of you have gone bankrupt. Perhaps you have totally destroyed a relationship with your parents. You have totally blown it in school.

I think about a guy whose wife decided that she no longer wanted to be married. She supposedly was a Christian. She said she was a Christian, but they had one of those difficult marriages. As I have said on a number of occasions, it is just the biggest fallacy in the world that if you have two Christians, both of them going to church, even if both of them are really committed Christians, both praying, both passionately pursuing God, that you will have an easy marriage because of temperaments, circumstances, traumas suffered in the past, emotional issues, and child raising issues. Some marriages are very, very difficult. They had a difficult marriage and she decided she wanted a divorce. She was adamantly opposed to working things out. She deeply resented the church getting involved and mucking around in her private life. She threatened to sue the church for harassment when a counselor called and said, "Can we get together?" She didn't want any church involvement. Her basic attitude was, "I am going to do what I need to do. You don't know what is going on in my life. You have no right to speak to me." So she took her kids and moved out of town. Her attorneys forced the sale of their home. She even took the guy's dog.

So this man goes from a life in which his identity is pretty clear. He is a father and a husband. He is living in the same home with his family for 12 years. Every night he comes home and they would have dinner together. His wife cooks. He moves from a life where his identity is clear – father and husband – to living alone in a one bedroom apartment with very little furniture. Just him and his TV and his new single bed and child support payments for the next 15 years.

A world destroyed. Not on the scale of Noah, but for him it was pretty big.

The extraordinary thing about broken, destroyed, shattered worlds is how many people experience this. What is extraordinary to me is how universal the story of Noah is. We want to put it in the category of one – that only Noah looked out on his world and saw destruction.

I just read a story of how the up and coming quarterback for the San Francisco 49er's, a guy by the name of Jeff Garcia, had a very fine year in the pros. Garcia is one of these undersized players. The NFL has a very narrow definition of the size of a player that it wants – how tall you need to be; how much you need to weigh; how fast you need to be in the 40. And there are all kinds of athletes who just get overlooked. And this is true in division 1 college programs.

Well, Garcia is one of those players. He is only 6'1". He was overlooked in the NFL. He played in Canada for five years and ended up being one of the best players in the Canadian Football League. He finally got a chance here in the US and at the age of 30, he has made the best of it.

But what interested me about Garcia's story were not his stats or what he did in college or Canada. It was the story of his mother. Thirteen months before Jeff Garcia was born his mother delivered twin girls who were 4-weeks premature. Both the twins died the next day. On Mother's Day in 1977 when Jeff was 7, his mother miscarried. Two weeks later, his 6-year old brother named Jason drowned during a family vacation. Then in July of the following year, Jeff's 5-year old sister, Kimberly, tumbled out of the back of a dump truck that was used in the family's gravel business and died of internal injuries. Twins who die, a miscarriage, the drowning of a 6-year old, and finally, the tragic death of a 5-year old.

Talk with people, even some of the most successful – even a pro-quarterback, and you will find out that somewhere in their life or the life of someone close to them, there was a destroyed world, a world that they blew up themselves through stupidity, through sins, through refusal to listen to warnings or counsel, or a world that was destroyed by others like that 9-year old's experience in a Dresden cellar. Or a world destroyed just by the fact that we are living outside the Garden of Eden. That the world is now fallen as a result of the sin of our original parents.

What is amazing to me is just how common destroyed worlds are. How many people experience a life-shattering crisis? So what do you do when your world is destroyed?

What I love about this text is that our new beginning doesn't start with us. You and me, when the rug is pulled out, initially we don't do anything. The initiative is with God. One of the most hopeful verses is found in Gen. 8:1, "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark and he sent a wind over the earth and the water receded. But God remembered Noah."

We certainly should not read this that God forgot about Noah during the storm and then said, "Oh my gosh – where is it that I've put Noah?" You know like when we lose our keys and we walk around scratching our heads saying, "Now, where did I put my keys? Let's see, I went upstairs to go to the bathroom. Then I went into the study. Oh yeah...I remember where I put them." It is never like that with God. "Where did I place you? I've lost sight of you." That's the way it feels when we are in the midst of the storm, when our world falls apart, it feels like we are forgotten.

But that is not what the author of Genesis means when he writes, "But God remembered Noah." It's not "I've mislaid Noah and now I remember where he was." This is a very common phrase in the Old Testament – But God remembered so and so. It often is used after a season of devastation or destruction or sadness or loss – we read the phrase, "God remembered" after God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen. 19:29. It says, "When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he remembered Abraham and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe."

Many famous women in the Old Testament couldn't conceive, which was, in those days, even more than today, a profound tragedy. A woman's world would be destroyed by her ability to not have a child. In those days a woman was a mother and a wife – period. She didn't float her resume and get another marketing rep position somewhere. It is interesting how many times in the Old Testament a woman whose world falls apart because she can't have a baby and it says, "God remembered." When Rachel couldn't have children and her rival, Leah, had six kids, it says in Gen. 30:22, "God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb." It says regarding Sarah in Gen. 21 that God remembered Sarah and she conceived. And Hannah who was miserable because her husband had another wife who was bearing children. In those days they practiced polygamy. Hannah was miserable. And it says that God remembered Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and she conceived.

When the children of Israel were in slavery in Egypt and they were groaning in their bondage, we read in Exodus 2 that God remembered them. Over and over

again, when people are sitting in darkness, suddenly the light shines upon them by God remembering them.

What does it mean to have God remember you? It is not that God goes through a mental process in which something that he forgot, he now calls to mind. To have God remember you is to have the Lord pay attention to you. To have the Lord notice you and act on what he notices by answering your prayers, by coming to your aid, by showing you his fatherly care. By giving you blessing where there has been a curse. The psalmist frequently prays, "Lord, remember us." What he is saying is "Lord, pay attention to us. Show us your favor. Deliver us. Let us, again, experience your grace."

The first step of a person's world being rebuilt, the starting point of a new beginning for someone, is God acting on their behalf by remembering them, by choosing to go to work on their behalf. So when you see someone going under, your prayer is "Lord, remember them. Act on their behalf. Show them your fatherly care." Remember me, O God. Notice me. Pay attention to me.

And notice that it is God who takes the initiative in calling Noah out. Look at verse 15: **Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you – the birds, the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground so that they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."**

When our world is destroyed, we don't want to come out again. Our desire is to withdraw. To find some place of safety and security, to hide in our arks, our little apartments, our homes. To bury ourselves in work for 70 hours a week. Whenever you see someone who is just working 80 hours a week, they are like Noah hiding in the ark, from really engaging in life.

And the Lord comes along to Noah, who is stuck in his little ark, who has looked out at a destroyed world. The Lord comes along and says, "Noah, it is time to come out of the ark now. It is time to re-engage life again."

I wonder how many of you have removed yourself from life? You are a single woman and you have gone through one more failed relationship with one more guy. You are unmarried and you have said, "Enough." You are in Christian leadership at some point in the past, but your ministry blew up. Maybe you burned out. Maybe you had some kind of failure. Maybe the support that was given you dried up. Maybe you were fired. But you have been sitting on the back burner for some length of time. And now you find yourself in the ark.

I wonder if there is anyone here that the Spirit of God might be speaking to today and saying the words that we find in Gen. 8:16, "Come out." It is time to come out of hiding. It is time to stop withdrawing. You need to re-engage again.

Maybe you have said, “Life has gotten way too complicated. It is not as simple as it used to be. I’m married now. I have kids. I have responsibilities.” The Lord would say to you to come out again into a place of usefulness.

Of course, Noah had to respond to the call to come out. God doesn’t force any of us out from our hiding places. I love the story of Jim Ryan. He was a world record holder in the mile when I was growing up. He was a Christian man. At the age of 19 he was the world record holder in the mile. No one ever had run the way that Jim Ryan ran. He got to the Olympics. He was the odds on favorite to win in the 1500 meter. Everyone expected Ryan to come home with a gold medal. As he was going around a turn, his foot got caught with someone else’s foot and he sprawled on the track. There he is lying on the track and his world is shattered. Everything that everyone expected, everything that he expected is all gone. The runners are running down the track and his ankle is cut. He has no hope of winning.

So what does Ryan do? Does he just walk off the track with his head down? Well, he gets up. It was really a historic moment in Olympic history. He gets up and to the cheers of the crowd, he runs the rest of the race by himself.

Is the Spirit of God speaking to anyone of you to lift yourself up off the track and to get back in the race?

When Noah comes out of the ark, I love what he does. It says in verse 18: **Noah came out together with his sons and his wife and his sons wives, all the animals and the creatures that move along the ground, all the birds and everything that moves on the earth came out of the ark one kind after another.** What is the first thing that Noah does? Verse 20: **Then Noah built an altar to the Lord.**

He doesn’t race out and try to rebuild his broken world. He doesn’t say, “okay, if I am going to re-engage life, then I need to go and find some wood for constructing a new home. I need to look for water or for food.” You know, you talk about the tyranny of the urgent. But would anyone have faulted Noah for first making sure that he had food for that evening’s dinner or a place to stay or a clean water supply? He had a lot of pressing things. If he was going to re-engage life, there were places to go and things to do and tasks to complete. But before Noah plans and strategizes and starts to rebuild his destroyed world, it says that he built an altar to the Lord.

So the first thing that he and his family do is they kneel down in the mud and worship God. Listen, again, before Noah starts strategizing for his future, he reconnects his relationship with God. That’s the first thing a man or woman needs to do. It is so crucial for any of you who have been through a crisis. Anyone whose world has imploded, any of you who have self-destructed, you have had a shattered world experience, your marriage has collapsed, you

discover that you have a problem with your body, some mysterious ailment, you have a diagnosis and it is negative, you have gone through a miscarriage, you have suffered an accident, you have experienced the loss of a loved one – the starting point for rebuilding life is to reconnect with God.

There is Noah squinting from the sun as he comes out of the ark. His eyes are not yet adjusted and the first thing he does, the first thing, is that he builds an altar. Maybe he takes a couple of boards from the ark or from the runway of the ark and he takes some of the animals and he sacrifices them up to God.

People are always going to come along to you as you emerge from your ark. You hear God calling you, “Come out.” You are taking the first steps out and are squinting in the sunlight. There is always someone who will come along and say, “Well, what’s the plan? What are you going to do now? Are you going to start dating again? What’s the plan? What’s the strategy? Are you going to be moving? I know someone you can send your resume to. I know someone you can get in touch with. I have a great lawyer for you to call. Let me give you the name of my doctor. He is really good.”

But the starting point for every new beginning that will succeed, the starting point for rebuilding your world is first constructing an altar. Restarting your relationship with God; reconnecting with the Lord; kneeling down in the mud and lifting your hands. You have to start with God.

I love the fact that the President-elect, in what appears to be his first public act since this election was over, had a prayer service and he worshipped God. There is a myth that you first need to establish yourself. You first need to build your business. You first need to get your feet under you and make sure you have a good foundation. And once you get established, you get your feet under you and you are done with school, you are starting to climb up the ladder, you have your house – then it is time for you to think about God. A lot of people view God like they view a leisure activity – you take care of the basic things in your life – you build your client base; you make sure you have a cushion in the bank, you have your insurance paid for. After every thing else is taken care of, then it is time to take up God the way you would take up golf or sailing. It’s an extra in life. It makes life enjoyable. God is certainly not one of the essentials.

You can live without sailing. Men, it’s hard to believe, but you could live without golf. And a lot of people relate to God that way. God is an extra. He makes life nice. It’s certainly nice when you have the leisure time to cultivate your spirituality. But man, you know, your 20’s are so crazy. You are looking for work, you are finishing up school, you are dating, you are beginning to pair off. The 20’s are so crazy, there is hardly any time for God. And the 30’s – my goodness. When you are in your 30’s, you’re married, you are buying your first house, you have a couple of little kids who are so demanding, there are school trips and soccer games and your career is just beginning to take off.

And the 40's – WOW, it doesn't get any easier. I mean the kids are getting older and you have to start to pay for college. The job is in full swing.

The first thing Noah does – the first thing is that he kneels down in the mud and he worships God and builds an altar to the Lord. It is absolutely a truth of life that if you don't start with God, if you don't start with Him, then likely you aren't going to relate to Him in the middle, and likely you aren't going to relate to Him at the end. That is certainly true of my days. If I don't begin with the Lord, with really kneeling before Him, the tyranny of the urgent takes over in the middle and end of the day. It is certainly true with my money. If I don't give God money off the top, if I don't tithe off the top, its not going to happen. There are just too many other things clamoring for my cash.

There is a great temptation not only because we need to survive and so we engage in a lot of activity, but even for our own sense of identity to want to rush out and find a new role, a new title, a new ministry after our worlds are destroyed. I think particularly of Christian leaders in this regard – former pastors and former leaders. The great temptation is “I have to find another pastoral role real quick. I have to get another job in ministry because that's who I am. I don't have a life apart from this role.” Here is the model for you former Christian leaders. Gen. 8:20, **Then Noah built an altar to the Lord.** The first thing you need to do when you lose a ministry is to regain your sense of God. To reconnect with him.

And you know, just a random thought here, Noah kneels down with his family in the mud. He worships God. I don't know how much faith Noah's family had or how much Noah's sons had or the wives of his sons had. It says that Noah was a righteous man, but I don't know if his sons were all that full of faith. I don't know if their wives were committed to God and full of faith. And yet, they all are there kneeling down in the mud worshipping the Lord.

I have counseled a lot of people who have tried to rebuild their broken worlds and restore a relationship with God. They honestly confess, “Rich, I have lost my fire. I don't know if I have it within me anymore to try again. To pick myself up like Jim Ryan and run on the track. I don't know if I have that spark anymore. Something has died inside. I don't have the passion. I used to, but it's gone.”

Do you know what my advice is to someone who says, “Well, maybe I need to re-engage with God; maybe I need to start out with God, but my engine just won't turn over. I just can't crank it anymore. The juice is gone.” My counsel is that if you don't have your own passion for worship, if you don't have your own fire, then steal someone else's until you do have your own passion and fire. Steal someone else's.

Maybe you come here to a weekend service. You aren't in any mood for church. You are in no mood to sing. You are in no mood to do anything other than to just

get out of here and be by yourself. There are weeks, to be honest, when I am not in the mood to get up here and teach. But if you let yourself, if you permit your heart to be lifted up by the music, if you don't just stand with your arms folded against your chest protecting yourself from everyone else, if you allow the melodies and the words and the passion of some of the worshippers to get inside of you, if you just choose to go along like Noah's sons and their wives did and kneel with a righteous man, if you let yourself be carried along by the faith of others, I will tell you what will happen to you. It is the same thing that happens to me all the time. You are going to discover that you are getting transformed inside. Not because it is something that comes from you, but something that comes into you. A few sparks from someone else's fire falls on your burned out logs.

I can't tell you the number of times when I have come to worship and the choosing to lift my hands and to thank God and praise him along side of God's people has transformed me. But here is where we rebuild our broken worlds. We start by rebuilding our broken relationships with God.

And then we read in Gen. 9:1, **Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."** The Lord renews the call upon mankind, the original call that was given to the first man and woman in Gen. 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it." And now in Gen. 9 the call is reissued: Be fruitful. Fill the earth. Here is the beginning again God. Here is the God who is willing to reissue a call. A God who is always in the business of fresh starts, of new beginnings. Not only of Genesis, but of regeneration. He not only loves to create people, but he loves to restore people. He not only makes worlds at the beginning, but he fixes and mends broken worlds. He brings people back to places of wholeness and usefulness. He is a God who allows people's failures to be stepping stones to future success and new callings.

I think of Peter standing on the beach after he had blown it with Christ, after he denied the Lord, after he betrayed his best friend, turned his back on him in his hour of need, ran for his life – I think of Peter standing on the beach and Jesus recapitulating, calling Peter back into service and into wholeness and into usefulness. He is standing on the same shore where the original call was issued. They go through the same scene again. The apostles had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus tells them to throw out the nets. They do. The nets break. The boats fill into sinking. And then Jesus issues the call again. Originally, it was "Follow me. I will make you fishers of men." Now it is "Peter, feed my sheep." Peter, get back up on the horse. Peter, get back in the saddle. The call is still there. I am not done with you yet.

God does that over and over again. He remembers us. He calls us out into life. We begin to re-engage him in worship and a call comes back, a calling.

He issued a new call to Jonah. He called Jonah to preach to the city of Ninevah. Jonah runs away. He blows it. He suffers the fate of a runaway. And there are these precious words, which are some of my favorite words in the whole of the prophetic writings, found in Jonah 3:1, **Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah yet a second time.** The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

The word of the Lord comes to Peter a second time. The word of the Lord comes to mankind again. Be fruitful and multiply. There is the beginning again God. There is the God of second chances. There is the God of resurrection, of starting over. The God who says, "I am not done with you yet."

When our world falls apart, we say, "That's it. That's the end." God comes along and says, "No, this is a new beginning."

When God issues a new calling, especially after a life-shattering event, that calling is often accompanied by new limits. Verse 2-3, **The fear and dread of you will upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground and upon all the fish of the sea, they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I have given you the green plants, I now give you everything.**

From being vegetarians in the Garden, people are now meat eaters. They have lost the harmony that existed before – before sin, before the fall. And I think what we are reading here is that you can't go back to Eden. A new call doesn't mean that you have regained your lost innocence. When God restores, it is not as if it was exactly the same as it was in the beginning. When he recalls, things are often different. When you lose your virginity, you can't have it back. Your first act of romance with your husband or your wife will not be your first act ever. When you get pregnant out of wedlock, you have to live as a single parent. You can't live as if you have no children. When you go through a divorce, you are a divorced person. When you have an affair, that affair is a part of your marital track record. There is no going back to Eden. Things change.

And one of the things that changes is this time around God issues limits on you in a more explicit way. Look at verse 4, **But you must not eat meat that has lifeblood in it. And for your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from every man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.**

When God issues a new calling, it is often accompanied by new limits. Limits that were only implicit in your first call. But you didn't understand it. You didn't get it. But now he makes them explicit. If you are going to re-engage, you re-

engage with the knowledge of your own weakness this time. You re-engage as a person who is painfully aware that you have the capacity to blow it, or people have the capacity to hurt you. Living life with limits means that when you re-engage, you now re-engage with an appreciation of the power of evil and the reality that you need to learn to live with limits.

Before you blew it, you had plenty of freedom to do what you wanted to do, to go where you wanted to go. But now that you have fallen off the horse you, hopefully, have gained a fresh sense of the power of the horse. It's capacity to buck. Your susceptibility to falling off. With every fresh call, there is a sense of our own frailty. We now see that we are not above temptations. That secret sin will eventually eat us alive. That when we don't start with God, then we don't finish with him either.

With every fresh call, we are painfully aware of the fact of other people's capacity to sin. That it is possible for people to betray us. That life is not always easy or fair or good. Failure is a great teacher. We learn through failure what we learn in no other way. We learn through weakness what we learn in no other way.

With every new call there are always new limits placed on us. Maybe before you were willing to let your spiritual disciplines slide. You got by on charm and personality and your talents. But now you realize that you can't live without regular contact with God. You just can't do it. Maybe you think someone else can, but you can't. So you have to put God's Word in your heart. And you have to hang onto him in prayer.

Maybe before you were willing to be away from your spouse for days without much communication. But now you realize you can't have a successful marriage and also be out on the road for your job all the time. You need regular contact with your mate. You need date nights. Your marriage can't do it without it.

Maybe before you were willing to watch almost anything on TV Maybe you were willing to watch any video. Maybe you were willing to do anything for the ministry. When God recalls you, he is always going to put fresh limits on you. He is going to ask you, "What did you learn about yourself? What do you need to have in your life to not repeat this again?" More severe restrictions on who you date? Where you go? More severe restrictions on what you eat or drink? You have been rescued out of the flood. Now what needs to be put in your life, what tough disciplines need to be present in your life to enable you to fulfill a new calling?

And finally, whenever God begins again a work inside a man or a woman, he fills that man or woman with new hope. He says to them, "Life is not over. Though your world may have fallen apart and been destroyed, there is still hope for you."

We read, **Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendents after you and with every**

living creature that was with you, the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all of those who came out of the ark with you – every living creature on the earth, I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. Here's the hope. This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come. I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.

Is there anything more beautiful, more striking, more wonderful than seeing a full rainbow appear in the sky against the backdrop of threatening dark rain clouds? That's what the Lord does. He puts a rainbow in the sky as a sign of fresh hope.

Let me tell you a little story in closing. It is from the Journal of the American Medical Association. A few years ago, a woman by the name of Jane McAdams told a story about her 69-year old mother who grew up during the depression. She lived a life like many of the folks who went through the great depression of utter frugality and practicality.

Her mother ended up in the hospital. She had signs of very serious cancer. So Jane McAdams, for her mother's birthday, bought her a very nice nightgown. She thought it would be nice for her in the hospital to have a beautiful nightgown. Her mother took it out of the bag and looked at it. She said, "Thank you, that's very kind of you. But it's not really what I want."

Jane asked her mother, "Well, what do you want?"

Jane said to her amazement that she pulled out an ad from the paper and she said, "I want one of these." It was a very expensive summer purse. A designer summer purse.

Jane thought to herself, "What an impractical gift. Here it is the middle of winter and my mother is saying that she wants a summer purse." Jane then said, "It dawned on me. What my mother was saying to me was, 'Do you think I have a future? Do you think I am going to be around in six months to enjoy this summer purse?'"

So she said, "I went out and bought her that purse. And my mother, being the practical woman she was, made sure that that purse didn't go to waste. She

used that purse and used it for the next 14 years. Mom is now 83 and is flying in for her 84 birthday and I plan to buy her another designer summer purse.”

A sign of hope. A rainbow in the sky. A purse. Someone comes along and puts their arm around you. Someone comes along and makes a difference in your life and they look you in the eye and they say, “I believe that you have a future. I believe that life is going to continue for you.”

A new beginning. Let's pray.

New Beginnings

Rich Nathan

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Roots: A Study in the Book of Genesis

Genesis 8, 9

- I. A World Destroyed

- II. A World Restored
 - A. New Initiative (Gen. 8:1, 15)
 - 1. God Remembered
 - 2. Come Out of the Ark
 - B. New Worship (Gen. 8:20)
 - C. New Calling (Gen. 9:1)
 - D. New Limits (Gen. 9:2-7)
 - E. New Hope (Gen. 9:8-17)