



Risky Business  
 Sermon on [Genesis 12:1-9](#)  
 Pastor Julie McCain, Sept. 14, 2014

*Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.*

Ben Saunders is a risk-taker and an explorer. He says he specializes in dragging heavy things around in cold places, and what he means by that is that he made it his mission in life to ski solo to the North Pole. Now if you're wondering how difficult that would be, here's a sense of thing: whereas about 2,000 people have climbed Everest, and 12 people have stood on the moon, only 4 people have skied solo to the North Pole. Ben is the first to admit that the reason so few have attempted this feat is because it's completely crazy, and at the very limits of the human body's ability—imagine skiing the equivalent of 31 marathons back to back while dragging everything you need to survive—about 400 pounds, behind you. Are you tired yet? Not many of us would attempt such a feat, and even us cold-hardy Minnesotans would probably die in the process if we did attempt. **So if you had to guess, what would you think the most common question Ben gets asked is?** Why? Why take the risk at all?

In our story today, we meet Abram, and we could ask the very same question of him. At 75 years old we'd envision him settling into his retirement with his wife Sarai, relaxing and doing all the things they've never had time to do until now. We hear that the two are quite settled—they've got a house, which not everyone had at that time, and they even have some slaves, which gives us an indication that retirement was treating them very, very well, and they were quite well-off.

And it's onto this scene that God steps, with a call on Abram's life.

The call is simply to go. Go and leave behind everything they've worked for—all the comforts of home and family. Go without a GPS or even a map, and without a destination, except that which God will reveal along the way. It's not quite what I have in mind for my retirement

Now God does make some promises to Abram, too, but his promises are pretty far-fetched.

**Who can help me come up with some of the promises that God makes to Abram (they're in the first 3 verses).**

- Make of you a great nation.
- Make your name great.
- Land
- Bless you, so that you will be a blessing to all the families of the earth

And all of these promises are implausible at best, because when Abram takes the first step of this journey, he is a childless, nomadic, no-name 75-year old; it seems like a tall tale to say that this simple man will bless the whole world.

→And God so often operates this way, making seemingly impossible promises and then bringing them to fruition in ways we never could have imagined.

And maybe Abram already knew that about God, or maybe he just had a lot of faith, because the next thing that we hear after God's call is that "Abram went."

Economists talk about "smart risk taking," which basically means that when you take a risk, it should be a calculated one that meets a certain set of criteria, and that you think is going to pay off for a variety of reasons; the idea is that you don't just accept every risk that comes your way, because some of them will not pay off.

### **As the saying goes, a bird in the hand is worth what?**

As we watch Abram leave behind his bird in the hand for two in the bush, we know that he would not be considered a smart risk taker.

- 1) Now unlike Abram, most of us will not be called to leave everything.
- 2) Most of us will not be called to such a radical break with our way of life.

But like Abram, following Jesus

- will take us to places we would not have imagined, with detours we did not plan.
- Often it will take us far outside the boundaries of our comfort zone.

→The truth is, faith is demanding, faith is risky, because we cannot know precisely where Jesus will send us, only that he'll send us out to love and serve the world.

And not only is that hard work, but it's also sometimes at odds with what we want:

- Sometimes he will call us to sacrifice—be it time, money, or energy.
- Sometime he will call us to consider someone else's needs above our own.
- And sometimes he will call us to love or serve someone whom we'd simply rather not.

→And with all its demands, with all its risk, some would ask:

### **Why take the risk of following at all?**

Recently my husband Brannon and I were in the cities for a wedding, and we stayed for the weekend with the groom's parents—the Bergs.

While we were there, they told me the story of their house.

Now the Bergs were raised Lutheran, have always gone to church, and to live out that faith as best they could.

When their kids were small, they decided it was time to buy a house, and they both fell in love with a beautiful 6 bedroom 4 bathroom house in Minneapolis.

They fell in love with this house which had 3 more bedrooms than they needed, and immediately they both felt a call on their hearts to open their home to people in need of a place to stay, and they simply couldn't ignore it. They spread the word among their friends and family that their door was always open, and over the last 20 years, they've had a steady stream of people, including us, walk through those doors to take them up on that offer.

Over the course of the last 20 years, the Bergs have had long-term, and short-term guests. They've had exchange students from Germany, college friends from Washington and relatives from Minnesota. They have had people stay for any length of time from days to years.

→To this day, rarely is their house ever empty, and often it is blessed.

Part of God's promise to Abram is this: I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. This is God's promise to **us** as well.

If you follow me, I will bless you, and you **will** be a blessing.

- Of course it would have been easier for the Bergs to ignore God's call and keep their house to themselves.
- Of course it would have been easier for Abram to stay home and ignore God's call altogether.

→And if you and I are looking for the smoothest, easiest path, we could try and do the same.

But we know that when we take the risk of faith, when we take the risk of following, we will find God's unexpected blessings all around us.

And if we let him, we'll find him blessing the whole world through us, too.