

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Trail Blazers**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Genesis 11:1-9, 27, 31**

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup> As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

<sup>3</sup> They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

<sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. <sup>6</sup> The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

<sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup> That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

<sup>27</sup> This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

<sup>31</sup> Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

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**Transcript:**

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The text this morning is from Genesis chapter 11. It says this, "As the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there." Then they said, "Come let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves, otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that people were building, and the Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come. Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stop building the city. That is why it is called, Babel, because the Lord confused the language of the whole world.

From there, the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Abraham, Nahor and Haran, and Haran became the father of Lot. Terah took his son, Abraham, his grandson, Lot son of her and his daughter-in-law, Sarah, the wife of his son, Abraham. And together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Well, when my kids were growing up, we would drive to the Bay Area a couple of times a year to see my wife's parents and we would always do it all in one day. And my wife and I were the meanest mommy and daddy ever, so we were told. In the history of mommy's and daddy's, none were meaner than we were. And so we did not have a DVD player in our van.

I mean, the deprivation our children experienced, it was real. The suffering was real. And because we limited their screen time, and so one of our lines to them was always self soothing as a life skill. You need to learn it now. But along the way, we had some routines. We'd always eat lunch in the same restaurant in Portland. We would always stop in Ashland for a snack and our kids loved all these rest stops. But of course the point of the trip wasn't just to stay in those places. We were headed to the Bay Area for family and land of great dim sum. So we kept moving forward. The point was not to get stuck in Medford. The point is never to get stuck in Medford. Okay? God would not call you to Medford. This is just a biblical teaching. The point was to keep moving forward. And so we did.

We're doing a sermon series about following God's leading in difficult times. And one of the ways God leads us in difficult times, especially in uncertain times actually, is to move us out of what's comfortable, out of what's familiar, and to keep our faith moving forward to new adventures as we partner with him in healing this world for our own good. So that we can experience the bigger, richer, deeper life, more courage, more hope, more meaning, more

purpose, more joy that God wants to give us, even in uncertain times. And that's what's going on in the story that I just read, where the people build this tower and then God comes and knocks it down, which raises the question, what is up with that?

Why is God so mean? What's wrong with building a tower for heaven's sake? Well, there's a couple of answers to that question, but the one I want to focus on today actually becomes more clear when you look at what's come before this story in Genesis. So as you go all the way back to the beginning of Genesis, God makes Adam and Eve and he says to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. And subdue does not mean exploit. It means go throughout all the earth and bring God's purposes to earth, what Jesus called the kingdom of God. Which is when this earth looks more like His heaven. It's when people know Jesus, it's when people have a relationship with him.

When divisions between different races, or spouses, or families are healed when the poor and the oppressed find justice. And God gave the job to all of us, to Adam and Eve and all of us, to fill the earth with the knowledge of God and God's kingdom. And God reiterates this a few chapters later after the big flood where it says, These were the three sons of Noah. And from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth. The repeated command of God was scatter and fill the earth with the knowledge of God. But look at how the Tower of Babel story starts. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and they settled there. Instead of scattering to fill the whole earth with God's purposes, they settled, stopped moving forward to bring God's kingdom. They got stuck in Medford. And they said, "Let us build ourselves a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves."

Well, aren't we proud? Aren't we all that. Right. Otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the earth. God told them to scatter. They don't want to scatter. They're afraid of scattering. So instead, they settled and not just settled in one place, they settled for smaller lives and tiny visions. God does not call us to be settlers. He calls us to be trailblazers. And trailblazers get to see things that settlers never will because trailblazers are always moving forward, opening up new possibilities. And because of that, trailblazers changed the world. Now by trailblazer, I don't necessarily mean that you have to quit your job and get a different one or move to a different city. I mean maybe, but mostly it's about our attitude. Can we be trailblazers right where we are? Where we live, work, play, learn. And this story shows us what happens when God makes us trailblazers, especially in uncertain times.

And the first thing that happens is we experience God's promise in the pain and the people in this story settle, so God has to move them on. And that's painful, it's punishment. But also look what he's doing even in the punishment he's fulfilling his promise to them. That they get to be the people who will carry the story of God to the entire Earth. And so their lives will be bigger because it'll be part of God's rescue mission. When we get stuck, maybe we're in bitterness because we can't forgive someone, or maybe we're bored because we're not part of God's rescue mission. Or maybe we're afraid to try a new job or a new city or a new ministry or a new way of doing things. When we do that, we settle for smaller lives in the one God wants to give us. And so he moves us on as he does the people in the story, for our own good.

In the pain of that, in the pain of that, God is leading them to his promise of a bigger life. We also see God's promise in the fact that they develop different languages, which again, is sort of looked at as the punishment, right? And partly it is but there's also his promise in this punishment. Because if you go to the end of the Bible in Revelation where it describes heaven, where everything is perfect and everything is the way that God wants it, it says there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne. So if different languages is a punishment, was a punishment for them, then why are there still different languages in heaven? It's because that richness of diversity was always part of God's plan. And he scattered them so that they would develop different cultures so that there would be different races, different cultures, all that.

Because if everyone was the same race, everyone was the same color, that would be boring. So God scatters them. So different races, different cultures, different languages emerge because that's more interesting. Even in the pain he is fulfilling his promise to them. Second, when God makes his trailblazers, his promise comes out of chaos, which is helpful because we are living in chaotic times. In this story, the tower and the city are destroyed, so that's chaos. But God is going to bring his promise out of that chaos, which we see in the very next story in Genesis chapter 12. Which parenthetically, by the way, Genesis 12 is where the Bible really starts. Genesis one through 11, that's just setting the scene. That's just the prologue. God's rescue mission, God's story of redemption actually starts after the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 12, and it starts with a list of names. And it says, Terah became the father of Abraham, Nahor and Haran, and Haran became the father of Lot.

And the Lord had said to Abraham, whose name later changes to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. And all peoples on earth will be blessed by you." And this is the start of God's redemption story. Out of the chaos of the Tower of Babel, God calls one man, Abraham and his wife Sarah, to spread God's love to the whole world and their descendants become the nation of Israel. And it is Israel's job supposed to be, to take God's purposes, to spread God's kingdom all over the world. Out of the chaos of the tower of Babel begins God's promise of redemption. Because see, when God wants to move us to a new level, or when God wants to move us to a new blessing, or when God wants to move us to a new life, a bigger life, sometimes he has to disrupt our routine.

Disturb what is familiar, stir things up, because chaos is almost always a part of moving forward almost always. For instance, let's say there's a relationship and the two people, there's a lot of tension between the two people. That happens sometimes. And let's say the two people aren't talking about the tension. That happens sometimes. And so everyone's on eggshells. The only way to heal that is to have really hard conversations, which feels like chaos. But it's out of that chaos that comes a healed relationship. We have seen a lot of chaos in the last couple of years, and God doesn't cause things like COVID and stuff like, God doesn't cause that stuff. But he uses those chaotic things to break us out of our routine, to stir things up, to move us forward.

Is there chaos in your life? Does sometimes life feel chaotic to you? Take heart because that chaos is probably part of God moving you to a new level, a new blessing. God's promises in

the pain, God's promise comes out of chaos. Third, his promise is personal. It's for you. The Tower of Babel's story, it just involves nameless, faceless masses of people. But then suddenly the text gets personal and starts listing names, Terah, Abraham, Sarah. Out of the chaos of the Tower of Babel, God begins his redemptive story to the whole world. And he's going to do it not with nameless, faceless masses of people, but with people with names and who have an assignment in that rescue mission. And eventually God himself is going to come in the person of Jesus to die on a cross, to pay the price for our sins so we could be reconciled to God.

Because you know what? Even God is a trailblazer. And even God doesn't settle, and he leaves heaven and comes as Jesus so that we could know him with a name and with a face. You have a personal role to play in God's rescue mission. Your name is on it somewhere. His promise is personal. In difficult times, God makes us trailblazers and we discover his promise in the pain, his promise coming out of chaos, his promise that is personal, and finally his promise is perpetual. It never stops. It keeps moving forward. The tower people settled so God scattered them, kept them moving. And then we get this genealogy, list of names of Abraham's family, and it says, Terah took his son, Abraham and his daughter-in-law, Sarah, they set out from her of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. So they're trailblazers moving on. But when they came to her and they settled there. There's that word again.

The tower people, they got settled so God unsettled them and kept them moving forward. And then they moved forward for a little bit and then they settle back down again. And so God had to move him on again, which he does in the very next verse. Genesis 12, the Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people to the land I will show you." And I love the way the King James version of the Bible translates this verse. It says, "Get thee out of thy country." Go, go, go, go. It's like as though Abraham were like a 40 year old still living in God's basement, right? Go, move already. Go, stop being stuck and settled. And this is our pattern as human beings. We love the familiar. I love the familiar. And so we settle and we stop moving forward. So God has to keep pushing us forward for our own good so that we can experience the bigger life he wants to give us.

As I've told you before, Anthony, who's on our staff, he helps me pick out my suits, but I need to say the shirt and tie combinations, that's all me. So don't blame him for that mess, right? He just helps me pick out the suits. Well, for a while, he was also saying to me, "We need to update your every day clothes," which is true. I mean, I have shirts that are older than Anthony. So a couple of weeks, and I have his permission to tell this. So a couple of weeks, he and another young man from this church took me shopping. It was a spiritual experience. I kid you not, they knew things about clothes that I didn't know, that I didn't know, that I needed to know. And then Anthony came to my house and went through all of my clothes and he said, because I asked him to, I invited him to, and he said, "You can keep this one and you can keep this one, but not this one. And whoa, really not this one. And well, maybe this one. Just don't wear in public."

Right? Fashion wise, I was stuck somewhere back into Clinton administration. But Anthony got me unstuck and kept me moving forward fashion wise. Our tendency is to settle and get stuck. So God has to keep us moving. And yes, this is harder. It's way harder. It's a much harder life. Did I mention that this is harder. But it's also bigger, richer, deeper, better. And this is true for us as individuals, and it is true for us collectively as a church. Our mission is to participate with Jesus in furthering the kingdom of God on the east side and the places in the world God sends us. That's our mission. That never changes ever. But how we do that mission does change from time to time as things around us change.

So as we talked about last week, our elders and pastors through prayer and fasting of discern, God leading us to fulfill our mission over the next three to five years by doing three things. First, equip the whole congregation to be fully devoted disciples. And a disciple means more than just going to church. Going to church is great. Keep going to church. That's great. But a disciple is someone who is always perpetually moving forward to become more like Jesus. And see, just going to church does not fill us with the courage, hope, meaning, purpose and joy that Jesus wants to give us. But being a disciple does, and people who just go to church, they don't change the world, but disciples do by how we serve others. And part of why we come to church is to be equipped to be disciples so God can scatter us, send us to help other people either in this church or outside of this church.

Second, we will empower every generation to reach young families because the east side is experiencing crazy growth right now, and a lot of the people who are moving here are diverse young families from all over the world. It's that every tribe, tongue, language thing that God promised. They're coming here. And we're called to be a church of all generations that reaches to the people who are here who happen to be young families. And third, we will further develop the campus to serve the needs of our church community and the side. And as I said last week, do something with this room so it's not so weird and the acoustics are better and all of that. And how we're going to do all that. We're going to talk about this tomorrow at Vision Night. So I'd really encourage you to come or join on livestream.

Tomorrow here Vision Night or livestream starts at five. If you come in person, there will be food, Chipotle, food. Okay. Yes, food, Chipotle, everything. Something for everyone. Childcare. Kids programs, we're starting it early. So if you have kids, you can come and still get them to bed. And there's childcare and kids programs. We feel God moves in these directions because when churches don't keep moving, we get stuck in maintenance mode. Just trying to hold the ball in place. Classic case study in business is the difference between Apple and Blockbuster. Okay. Blockbuster rented videotapes for VCRs. And if you're too young to know what that is, just look it up, okay. It was a dark and primitive time in the world of home entertainment. And then though, Netflix comes along and starts streaming, but Blockbuster, they just kept renting tapes and they went into maintenance mode, which is always inevitably followed by the death spiral. And they went out of business because they thought that they were in the tape renting business. They weren't in the tape renting business, they were in the home entertainment business. And if they'd understood that, they would've started streaming before Netflix ever did. In fact, they

even had a chance to buy Netflix early on, but they said no because they could not see the future. Now, contrast that with Apple. And when they went into maintenance mode, they said, "Wait a minute, we're not in the computer business. We're in the information business." And then you get the iPhone and pH, they took off. When churches don't move forward, they enter into maintenance mode. And here's the thing, the kingdom of God should never be in maintenance mode. The kingdom of God can never be in maintenance mode, especially in chaotic times like we're in. God leads us to be trailblazers, to bring hope to a hopeless world.

And as a church, we'll continue to discern how we do that together. You may have noticed that there in the lobby where the stone is that we put up to remind us of God's faithfulness during the pandemic, today, there's some little rocks around it. And we're inviting you to take one of those rocks home today as a reminder to pray about how God might want you to be part of this vision to keep your faith and this church moving forward. A great way to do that would be to be in an all in group. If you aren't already, there are people in the lobby with lanyards. They can help you be in a group today. Or maybe it's to serve in our kids and students' ministry because nothing keeps your faith moving forward like helping younger person know Jesus. And these little guys, they need to know Jesus, so we need to be there for them.

Or maybe you do that as an all in group. Your whole group maybe says collectively, we'll take a class of Sunday schoolers for the entire year so that even though each person in your group isn't there every week, they get the same rotation of teachers throughout the year. Maybe it's to coach soccer, but do that in a way that brings God's kingdom. Maybe that's to bring God's kingdom in your school or where you work, or go on a short-term mission trip. Whatever it is, take a rock and pray over it and ask God where he wants you to bring his kingdom, either inside this church, outside this church, or both so that you can keep moving forward in your faith. And we can keep moving forward as a church to bring God's healing and love to people who need it.

I recently saw an interview with a woman named Jennifer Bricker, who grew up idolizing the gymnast, Dominique Moceanu. And Jennifer wanted to be a gymnast, just like Dominique. There was only one problem. She was born without legs and her birth parents abandoned her. So she was adopted by parents who followed Jesus and believed in never settling, being trailblazers through the power of God. So Jennifer learned to do tumbling with her dad on a trampoline. And by high school she was the state champion in tumbling in the state of Illinois. She also played other sports using her hands to run, including basketball, which you would think wouldn't work. But she had this great line. She said, "Oh, I can steal the ball like nobody's business." Right? Because she was down there, right. Now, of course she's had times of depression, sadness, anger, of course, of course, of course.

But in difficult times, God kept calling her not to settle, but to keep being a trailblazer. Well, when she was 16, God put a thought in her brain and she started wondering who her birth parents were. And she knew that was God because she had never had that thought in her whole life. So one day she asked her mom, who were my birth parents? And her mom said, and this is a direct quote, "I'll tell you, but you better sit down." And Jennifer said, "I'm always sitting down

mom, what's the big deal? What would my last name have been?" And her mom said, "Moceanu. Your Dominique's sister." This gymnast she grew up idolizing, was her sister. What are the chances of that? So she connected, wrote to do Dominique and got to know her. And in getting to know her, discover that Dominique was raised in an abusive house, which she is now safe from.

But had Jennifer remained in that house, she never would've had the Christian parents she had who believed in being trailblazers and moving forward. And now Jennifer has a ministry. She travels all over the world as a gymnast and tells her story to bring hope to other people who are in pain and who are hurting, and shows that God can bring good things out of even really hard things. And in the interview I saw with her, she said, "Of course there are times that I wish I had legs. Then I could do lots of stuff like wear shoes, I love shoes, I love cute shoes. All the irony. So yeah, of course." But she said, "You know what? At the end of the day, if it comes down to being used by God to bring hope to others or wearing shoes, hands down, I will take the life I've got any day of the week."

It would have been so easy for her to just settle into bitterness or some kind of stasis. I don't have legs. What can I do? Nothing. But God kept moving her forward. Gymnastics, basketball, find your birth family, travel, and have a ministry of encouragement. And the result was a bigger life as she brings hope to others, the lack of legs didn't stop her. God just kept moving her forward. And she is experiencing God's promising his pain in her pain, promise out of chaos, promise that is personal and promise that is perpetual. Now your story will be different, but she shows us what is possible when we let God move us out of settled, sedate, sleepy, serious, somber, solid, stupid stuckness and move forward instead.

We are in difficult times and difficult times require trailblazing Christians and trailblazing church who bring God's promise and healing and hope wherever we go. And some part of that mission has your name on it. So where is God calling you to move forward today? So Jesus, thank you so much that you call us to move forward. Thank you so much that when we are stuck, you move us ahead sometimes even when we don't want to be moved, you move us. Lord, thank you for that. And Lord out of the chaos that's all around us, we know you're going to move us to a new level, bring your promise. So Lord, help us to see you where you're leading, follow you. What's our part in your rescue mission. Show us Jesus, and we will follow you so that the whole world can know that you are Lord. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*



**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- When has God shaken things up in your life to move you forward?
- Where might you be stuck right now and how might you move forward?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.