

“God’s Big Idea”

Scripture: **Genesis 12:1-4; Galatians 3:23-4:7**

Rev. Lewis Galloway

June 21, 2026



A young boy in a congregation we once served had an active imagination. When he was four years old, we would see him out in the yard, grimacing, growling, and flexing his muscles in a torn t-shirt. When I called out to him, "Hi! Tim," he would reply in a menacing voice, "I not Tim. I the Incredible Hulk." Other days, we would see him outside, standing on a crate and preaching to the cows in a field next door. He was a boy with big ideas. For a long time, we were not sure where his big ideas and vivid imagination would lead him. I am happy to report to you that he did not turn into the Hulk. He became an ordained minister in the Methodist Church.

Books have been published that describe the 100 people, ideas, inventions, or discoveries that have changed the world. It is good to think about the impact that Plato or Kant, the Wright brothers or

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Susan B. Anthony, Hippocrates or Gandhi, Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King, Jr. have made on the world. These were all people with big ideas.

God had a big idea in mind when he called Abraham and Sarah to leave their family, kindred, and native land for an unknown country. God wanted to give them a new land, a home, and a huge family. God wanted to give them even more than that. The Lord wanted them to have the opportunity to be a blessing to others—not just to a select few, but to the whole earth. Abraham and Sarah believed God. According to Genesis, they didn't say a word. They just left. In spite of their old age, the distance they had to go, and the uncertainties of the trip, they believed God. They packed their bags and left.

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Through their son Isaac, Abraham and Sarah had many descendants. Generations passed. Somewhere along the way, the big idea got smaller. The dream of a land, a people, and being a blessing to others became more like a catnap. There were times of joy and prosperity. But there were also times of disobedience and slavery. When the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God delivered them by the hand of Moses. The people must have felt that they were in dreamland again. God gave them the law to guide their life together. Over the generations, they forgot that the law was given not to be a burden, but a joy, not to be a curse, but a blessing. The law was a sign of their freedom, not their bondage. It was an expression of God's grace. It was the way to live together in a healthy, grace-filled community of faith.

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The people forgot the purpose of the law. The law became, as Paul said, a kind of guardian or disciplinarian. The Greek word is "paidagogos" from which we get our word "pedagogue." It does not mean "school-master" or "tutor" as it is sometimes translated. The "pedagogue" was the household slave who took the children to and from school and watched over them. The people paid less and less attention to their guardian or law and found themselves in bondage again. The law became a nagging reminder of their sinfulness and their failure to live as beloved children of God. Some even thought that if they tried harder and obeyed every jot and tittle of the law, then they would have a path to salvation. God’s salvation did not rest upon doing the good works, but upon grace. Focusing on the law, it was easy to forget about others. Who had the luxury to think about

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God's plan for them to be a blessing to the whole world? It was all they could do to keep body and soul together. God's big idea seemed like one big impossibility.

The law was not the final gift. It was the means to something better. Paul tells us that the law had been pointing to Christ all along. Paul says, "The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came." God was not about to give up on the big idea given to Abraham and Sarah so long ago. God sent Jesus Christ to do what the law could not do. God sent Christ to set us free and to create a whole new family of faith. Jesus Christ is God's big idea. We are no longer minor children under the care of a guardian. We are God's children now together in Christ. The Spirit of God dwells within us. The Spirit cries out to God from deep within us the same words that were on the lips of Jesus,

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"Abba! Father!" Then we know who we are and whose we are. We are no longer slaves; we are free. We are no longer abandoned; we are adopted as God's children. We are no longer minor children; we are heirs with Christ. In our baptism we have put on Christ like a new suit of clothes.

I remember a Sunday years ago when I was worshipping in my home congregation. On that particular Sunday, a young man was being baptized. After his baptism, the pastor said that the young man wanted to say something to the congregation. The young man told how he had been leading a life centered on little else than partying and aimless pursuits. He felt like his life wasn't going anywhere, but that feeling wasn't enough to change anything. He was working in a convenience store when the store was robbed and he was shot. The shooting caused

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him to be in danger of permanently losing his eyesight. After a long recovery, he regained his sight. That day in church, he said, “God, who first gave me sight, took my sight away for a time so that I might truly see. Christ saved me and made me his. Before this, I did not know who I was, but now I see that I am a beloved child of God.” We too, by the grace of God and the love of Jesus Christ, are beloved children of God.

You might say that we have come into our inheritance. Our inheritance is God's big idea to create a whole new family of those who have come to know God's grace in Jesus Christ. Our inheritance contains the commission to be a blessing to others. We are to be a family in which "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus." We, who were enemies, at odds with one another, are now one

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in Christ. God's big idea is for those Jews who were slaves to the impossible demands of the law to find peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. God's big idea is for those Gentiles who were enslaved to other forces and desires find peace with God through Jesus Christ. God's big idea is to create a family of faith in which there is room for all.

How far do we take God's big idea? In the Bible, the followers of Jesus took God's idea seriously enough to change their ways of thinking and living. The slave owner Philemon welcomed his runaway slave Onesimus home, no longer as a slave but as a brother in the faith. From that moment on, slavery was a dying institution. Peter, the righteous Jew, entered the home of Cornelius, the Roman Gentile Centurion, and realized that God no longer made distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable people. He embraced him like a long-

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lost friend. From that moment on, the idea that all people are children of God was planted in the human soul. Women like Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to become disciples just like the men. From that moment on, the women's movement took hold in the church. People who had an abundance shared what they had with those who were poor and hungry so that there was no need or want in the church. From that moment on, social justice and human compassion were rooted in the fabric of the church.

I once heard William Sloan Coffin say that the level of revelation in Scripture is always greater than the level of its implementation in Scripture. In other words, God has given us a destiny to be a community in which there is room for all and room to grow. There are places in Scripture where God's big idea was not fully implemented in

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the fledgling congregations of the Roman world. Slavery was still tolerated as an institution; the role of women was not equal in every congregation; not everyone welcomed strangers into the church. Yet, the big idea was still there stirring up the waters, provoking change, encouraging love, moving hearts to justice, and opening doors to outsiders. You can't stop God's big idea. There are times when the church gives lip service to God's big idea, but the church has yet to practice God's big idea. There are times when the church has not welcomed all people and times the church has kept silent in the face of injustice, poverty, and crying human need. You can't stop God's big idea. It will win out. It is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to see that it comes to pass. God loves each one of us; God loves all of us together.

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Dr. Fred Craddock, began his ministry in a small rural church near Oak Ridge, Tenn. When he served the church, the nuclear facility at Oak Ridge was under construction. Construction workers came from all over the country to work on the project. They lived in mobile homes, campers, or wherever they could find a cheap place to live. Some of the workers began to visit that beautiful white clapboard church with its hand-hewn poplar pews, kerosene lamps, and old organ in the chancel. One Sunday after church, Craddock suggested to one of the leaders of the church that they have an evangelistic campaign to invite these workers to faith and membership in the church. The leader suggested that they were not "our kind of people" and that they wouldn't fit in. He said he would call a meeting of the Board the next week to discuss it. When the meeting opened, one of

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the Board members immediately moved that to be a member of the church one had to own property in the county. The motion passed.

There was only one vote against the motion. That vote was Fred Craddock. He was quickly reminded that he was the preacher and his vote didn't count.

Many years later, Fred Craddock and his wife were making a trip through Tennessee. He wanted to show her the church he had talked about so much. When he pulled up to the church, he was amazed to see that on a Saturday the parking lot filled with cars, pickup trucks, and motorcycles. He saw a sign that read, "Barbecue, All You Can Eat." The church had become a restaurant. The hand-hewn pews had been removed for aluminum tables; electric lights replaced the kerosene lamps; the organ was pushed into a corner. He couldn't believe his

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eyes. In the church were people from all walks of life, sitting down together, eating barbecue, hush puppies, coleslaw, and drinking sweet tea. Fred Craddock turned to his wife and said, “It’s a good thing that this church is now a restaurant; otherwise, all these people wouldn’t be welcomed here.”

That is what happens when we ignore God’s big idea. Meanwhile, in spite of human resistance, God is creating one new family of faith that has room for all. Has God's big idea taken hold of your life?