



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

### Genesis 17:1-8 'Abram Gets a Name Change'

<sup>1</sup> When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.'

I have an unusual surname and perhaps that's one of the reasons why I've always been interested in names. The name 'Tabraham' is not – as we once thought – a corruption of 'the-Abraham', So it's not a contraction of 'The-Abraham' becoming 'T'Abraham' becoming 'Tabraham'. Alas, more prosaically, the name derives from a village near Cambridge, and the 'ham' is a Viking word for 'settlement'. Oh well, at least 'Barrie' is old Celtic for 'good marksman'!

The passage from Genesis is intriguing. Abram, which roughly translated means '*my Father [God] is exalted*', is told by God that he his name will be changed to '*Abraham*', which can be rendered '*father of a great people*'. In Hebrew culture, a person's name revealed something of their nature, but always in a dynamic sense, implying activity – so we have 'Jacob' is 'deceiver', and 'Ruth' is 'friend'. In Abraham's case, it is God's promise that he will be instrumental in God's plan for the redemption of his people.

In years to come, when Moses would come face to face with God and ask his name, God's reply was the enigmatic "I AM". It seems like a riddle, but it really means "I will be what I will be", or "I am the living God". Moses is to understand that, unlike like the stone images of pagan gods, God would be *active with his people*. Much later, the early Christians would hear the name of JESUS and know that it came from 'Joshua', which means 'Saviour'. Nothing has changed since then. God is still with his people; he is truly 'Emmanuel', for he is 'God-with-us', because his nature and his name is love. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:** *from a hymn by Thomas Olivers (1725-1799) StF 91*

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above.  
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love.  
Jehovah! Great I AM! By earth and heaven confessed;  
I bow and bless the sacred name for ever blessed.



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