

Series Based Bible Study



Part 1 of 2

Vineyard Columbus

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The Journey of Faith

A Vineyard Columbus Small Group Study Series

Series Description

Faith is not just a momentary or single act of trust. Nor is it something you get at the beginning of the Christian life. Faith is a lifelong process that continually exerts demands on us at every stage and challenge of life—from childhood to old age; from school to work to retirement; and in joy and sorrow. In this series, we will explore Abraham’s journey of faith through life’s many seasons.



This guide offers the **first 6 weeks (11 total)** for your small group to work through. At Vineyard Columbus, we encourage your group to use this study as one component of your time together. We truly believe that disciples of Jesus will mature best when they engage in corporate worship, prayer ministry, practicing the prophetic, studying the Bible, serving our neighbors, community, church, and fellowshiping together. This study only covers one of those aspects, the Bible. Suggestions and ideas will be posited to aid the leader regarding the other areas. We pray this will be helpful to your group as you explore “The Journey of Faith.”

Table of Contents:	Page
Week 1- Faith to Begin the Journey Part 1.....	5
Week 2- Faith to Begin the Journey Part 2.....	15
Week 3- Faith in God’s Provision.....	25
Week 4- Saving Faith.....	34
Week 5- Faith to Wait.....	42
Week 6- Faith in God’s Promises.....	50
Summary of Ministry Time.....	57

How to use this Study Series

Leaders are encouraged to briefly look over all studies before you teach or hand them out to alternative teachers within the group. ***There is a summary of Ministry Ideas from the entire series in the back. The ministry ideas are meant to build upon each other whenever possible and some ideas will take longer planning than others. Reading the full arch of Ministry Ideas before you start the series as a small group may provide a much richer and fuller experience.***

Having all studies provided at the start of a sermon series will give leaders the opportunity to give studies to potential teachers or co-leaders weeks ahead of time. Our prayer is that many more disciples of Jesus will feel comfortable sharing and leading others in discussion during small group. If you have any questions, please email us at: smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

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Week 1



Faith to Begin the Journey

Part I

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Tips: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background:

Most of us, whether we have much experience with the Bible or not, know that Genesis is at the beginning. The book of Genesis is in fact a book of beginnings. We see the beginning of God's Creation, the beginning of our brokenness, and the beginning of God's plan to restore us through Abraham and his family. If we try, we can begin to see our lives in this book, no matter where we might find ourselves along our own journey of faith.

Starter Questions:

Lots of people love to start things, hence the entrepreneur craze right now. Why do you think that is? Other people seem to really love finishing things, to say,

Bible Verses

Genesis 11:27 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. 28 While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. 29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. 30 Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. 31 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 Harran, they settled there. 32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran..

12:1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

"Look! I'm done. This is what I've made." Why do you think that is?

Which are you?

Does anyone ever travel to a new place without using GPS? Why or why not?

Has anyone ever moved to a new city, new school, new job, without knowing a single person? What was that like? How did you feel? What made it better/worse?

Opening Prayer - Pray for God to help you and your group see your lives in the Genesis story, and to give you faith to trust him and go forward with him on your journey.

Scripture: Have a volunteer read Genesis 11:27-32. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

We pick up in Genesis at the "account of Terah's family line." A lot of people reading the Bible, when they see something like this, immediately shut their brains off because they think it's just going to be some extremely boring genealogical record. That may be true, but it's also a recap of people, places, and things that are important in knowing what's going on in the story.

- You may have noticed a few tragic or unfortunate things that are recounted in this section. Anyone care to point them out to us?

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. 9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

-Abram's brother, Haran, died fairly early on in life.

Abram's wife, Sarai, was unable to have children.

The family moved away from their hometown and familiar land/community.

- What does this show us?

-Abram's life is incredibly relatable to ours! Many of us have experienced such similar things in our lives, or at least know someone else who has. Not many of us are in positions of high esteem or influence, and neither was Abram. Even if we are, we've still experienced hardship or loss.

- Think about a time in your life when something unexpected and difficult happened. You don't have to share, but think about what you were thinking and feeling when you went through that. Did you try to take control of the situation yourself? Did you shut down and succumb to the circumstance out of your control? Feel free to share if you'd like, but just take a moment to reflect on your life and some of the things you've experienced.

*Leader, give room for people to think for just a moment, up to 30 seconds.

In the time of Abram, position, status, influence, and even the signs of God's blessing on you were determined by the size of your family and the land/livestock you

owned and managed. For Abram's family to have lost one of their sons (Abram's brother) and for Abram's wife Sarai to be barren meant they were not regarded very highly in society, and even to have done something wrong to deserve a bit of God's judgment in this way.

- What are some things in our current society that are markers or what some people would consider being a "blessing?"

So, this is where Abram and his family begin. They don't have a lot, they trust God, but they may just be getting by with the status quo of life.

Scripture: Have a volunteer read Genesis 12:1-9. It may help to have it read twice!

This, in some way, must have come out of nowhere for Abram. We can imagine Abram being a devout believer in the God of his ancestors, but we don't know if there was ever a time that he heard from God like this before. Here Abram hears a specific word from God.

Go. Leave everyone and everything you know. I will show you where I'm taking you, just not yet. If you do this, I will bless you beyond your wildest imagination and dreams. Trust me.

- Do you remember what we just talked about a few minutes, the markers of God's blessing? What were they?

-Large family, livestock, land

Tips:
Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quite personalities in your group.

Abram currently has none of those things. He has some livestock with him, but probably not much since they've been traveling. He's just recently traveled with his father to a new land, and his wife is barren, not to mention they are both getting older in age. But God still says, "Go."

The journey with God may require, especially at the beginning, leaving the familiar and venturing into the unknown, going somewhere you've never gone before and never dreamed of going.

Then, God says this to Abram.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

- What could possibly be going through Abram's mind?
What would be going through your mind?

-This is crazy. I don't believe it. I'm tired. I don't want to. There's no way. What have I got to lose? Will anyone believe me? I'm scared. Where are we going? How could that possibly happen? I'm not great, so how is God going to make me great?

Responding to God's call and beginning a journey with him will change your life. But, God is not only about

changing just your life, but the lives of other people through you.

We unfortunately can't get inside of Abram's head and hear his thoughts, but we can see his actions.

- What did Abram do?

-So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...

He just went. He didn't linger or bicker or run the other way. He just went as God told him. He trusted God.

- Think about someone you love and trust, someone you know wouldn't lie to you or hurt you, who wants the best for you. Maybe a parent, a spouse, a former coach or teacher, maybe a boss or leader. If they told you to do something without giving much clarity, would you do it? Why or why not? What do you need from that person for you to just do it without lingering, bickering, or asking questions?

-Give space for people to answer.

When we are dealing with God, we are dealing with the ultimate friend, the most trustworthy partner, the deepest lover, and the most experienced leader.

Believing, like Abram, that God is good and worth trusting, gives us the ability and faith to just go without hesitation.

Sometimes that happens when we are desperate and life isn't working out the way we'd hoped. Abram lost his brother, his wife is unable to bear children, he left his homeland, and he doesn't have a very promising future ahead of him otherwise.

Other times we simply need to hear clearly from God. The scripture tells us that Abram heard the Lord speak to him very clearly and very succinctly. When we hear from God like that, when He speaks to us in a clear and direct way, there's no debating where it came from. We know it's him, and that's enough.

- What do you need from God in order to respond to him, to not hesitate or question? What is keeping you from responding to him right now?

-Give people space to answer.

- If you could sum up Abram in this passage with one word, one trait, or one gift, what would it be?

-Faith, trust, belief, action, movement

**As the leader, go with whatever has the most traction, and let discussion happen if it's there. Step in at some point with "faith."*

Faith is the overarching theme of not only in this passage, but in all of Abram's life.

- What is faith?

-Assurance of something hoped for because of the goodness and nature of God, believing without necessarily seeing, trusting that you are taken care of, hoping hopefully

Faith isn't just mush. It's action. It's deep-seated trust and belief that doesn't waver.

God does not call us only when things are going well. We can have faith and be called by God despite our circumstances, as we see in the life of Abram and the lives of just about everyone else in the Bible, as a matter of fact.

Beginning the journey takes faith. Continuing the journey takes faith. Every step takes faith. But we can take comfort in the fact that God doesn't ask more of us than the right here and right now, the next step. As Pastor Rich always says, the life of a Christian is simply left foot, right foot. We take it one step at a time. To begin the journey, you need enough faith for just that – to begin. God will continue to give you more, and to grow and develop your trust in him

Ministry Time Application:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Write down anything in your life that may be difficult for you to walk away from if God were to tell you to “go.” Is there anything that may take the place of God's call? Would you refuse to leave that thing, hobby, person behind? Break down into groups of two or three to pray together and offer our lists up to God. He desires our

whole hearts, free from distraction and weight, to listen and respond to him.

Option 2:

If your group is comfortable practicing “waiting on the Lord” in silence, this would be a good time to engage in that. Take 2-3 minutes in silence, listening to God, and not writing anything. After that time, have each person write on one side of the page things that is holding you back from following God. This could be fear, not hearing anything from him at all, worry, anxiety, anger, things you can’t let go of, etc. On the other side, write down what areas in your life you want to hear God say, “go.” Break down into smaller groups of two or three to pray through these things.

Week 2



Faith to Begin the Journey

Part 2

Genesis 12:9-12:20

Tips:

There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background:

Most of us, whether we have much experience with the Bible or not, know that Genesis is at the beginning. The book of Genesis is in fact a book of beginnings. We see the beginning of God's Creation, the beginning of our brokenness, and the beginning of God's plan to restore us through Abraham and his family. If we try, we can begin to see our lives in this book, no matter where we might find ourselves along our own journey of faith..

Starter Questions:

Have you ever been enjoying a nice evening or time with friends and something happened that changed the mood? Have you ever been eating a great meal and then discovered a hair?

9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. 10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." 14 When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. 15 And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. 17 But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. 18 So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?" ...

When have you been anticipating a wonderful or exciting event and as it started, something happened to sour the experience?

Last week we discussed how Abram was called by God despite life circumstances and the faith he had to trust God one step at a time. We attempted to see our lives and journey of faith through the beginning of Abram's story. Up to this point, Abram hasn't experienced a difficult trial. He's moved when God has told him to, and he's heard God's promises for him.

Opening Prayer *Pray for God to speak to each person, to give each person more courage and depth, and to open your hearts to receive whatever he has for you.*

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions

Now we see Abram face some less than ideal situations.

- What is the first trial mentioned that Abram and his family are facing?

-A famine in the land

Abram and his family had traveled to the Negev, which is to the south of modern day Israel, in the dry desert region far removed from any body of water. The people living in this area were completely dependent on seasonal rains for their livelihood and survival. In this place and time, Abram and his family were desperate. Egypt was looking really good at this point, as it butted

19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" 20 Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

right up against the great Nile River, a reliable source of water that gave access to plentiful harvests and healthy livestock. Abram deeply desired to settle his family there.

We can take a second and think about how Abram must feel. Things are not necessarily what he may have expected when stepping out and following God. Maybe he expected the blessing to be more immediate, or at least a little less difficult.

Abram experienced unexpected hardships at the beginning of his journey.

- Has anyone else experienced unexpected hardships while following God? Are you experiencing any right now that you'd like to share?

-Leader, if no one speaks up, you lead the way with a personal story or an example – losing a job, friends that don't believe and stop talking to you, car accident, moving to a new city for a job but it not being as great as you'd thought

Tips:
Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quite personalities in your group.

I'm sure you've all heard of the "greener grass" syndrome, right? In this mindset, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, it's always better at the next place than it is right here. Oftentimes we are wrong with that assumption. We just simply trade one problem or discomfort for another.

Notes:

Abram may have had this, and understandably so. They were in the middle of a severe famine in the Negev, and Egypt was lush and beautiful. But, as we see, he trades one issue for another.

Have someone read verses 10 through 13 again

- Can someone describe what's going on here, the issue at hand for Abram?

-Sarai was beautiful, and Pharaoh had all power in Egypt, therefore Abram knew he would want to add Sarai to his concubines. In order to do so, Pharaoh would kill her husband. Abram didn't want to die, but really wanted to be in Egypt to take better care of his family, so he and Sarai lied to Pharaoh to spare Abram's life.

Interesting bind to be in, is it not?

- How did it work out for Abram and Sarai initially?

-Sarai was taken into his palace, and Abram got a ton of livestock and servants for Pharaoh's fondness of Abram's "sister." Pharaoh wanted a good relationship with his new wife's "brother."

- Think of Sarai's position. We don't see any reaction from her, but we can't then assume she actually was

Tips:

When people partner up in pairs to pray, it will build trust and intimacy over time. This is a great way to have your group improve overall discussion. The more people you end up trusting in your group, the more open your discussion time will be.

silent and didn't have anything to say. What may be going through her mind?

-This is working! We are safe! God is blessing us! OR I can't believe Abram would do this to me! Abram is a coward! This can't be what God is planning for us.

- What is the root of Abram's decision to conjure up this lie?

-Fear. Abram fears the Egyptians and doesn't want to be killed by Pharaoh.

This is absolutely understandable, right? Your family is in dire need of food and water. You're in the middle of the desert, in a famine, and you see the very tempting land right next to you that's flourishing. What else would any of us do in a situation like that?

- No need to share the specifics, but have you ever made up a little "white lie" in order to protect yourself or your friends/family when you were in a tight spot? Something that would help you out a little bit because you were desperate?

God had been crystal clear about his promises to Abram and Abram's family, and Abram had obeyed very well. He didn't question or hesitate. He trusted God at his word. In this situation, Abram does not directly disobey God, for God did not tell him to not go into Egypt, nor did God tell Abram what to say to Pharaoh. Abram was being shrewd in the moment and made a plan that he thought would work well for them.

- Do you think this was a good or bad decision on Abram's part? Was Abram being shrewd and using the best of his judgment? Or did Abram fear Pharaoh and the famine more than he feared and trusted God by taking the situation into his own hands?

-Leader: see where this goes. Overall, the answer is 'yes' to both questions. They aren't mutually exclusive. Sometimes we can have the best intentions and make what seems to be a great decision, but at the same time have a lack of trust in God and therefore disregard his promises to us.

What happened as a result of his actions? Two things.

It seemed to go well for them at first, but then God cracked down. But not on Abram and Sarai for their decision; on Pharaoh. Disease and sickness for any religious person at that time were seen as a consequence for displeasing the 'gods.' Pharaoh wanted nothing to do with that. He determined it was because of Abram and Sarai that this had happened to him – 'What have you done to me?' – and demanded that they take their things, their family, and get out of Egypt.

- This is both good and bad. Why?

-Good because they were spared, Abram kept his wife, seemingly kept all of his livestock and servants, and ultimately was not killed but instead let go on good accord.

-Bad because Abram was escaping the famine and desperately wanted to settle down in promising Egypt, but is now sent back the way he came.

Second, God displayed his action and faithfulness despite of Abram's choices. God told Abram to 'go,' that he would show Abram where, and bless him as a result. Even though Abram disregarded God, even for a small amount of time, God continued to press Abram forward whether he liked it or not.

There is a wonderful book on discipleship and the process of being a follower of Jesus written by the pastor, theologian, and writer Eugene Peterson called "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction." It's a really great read and I recommend it to anyone who wants to grow in their faith and obedience in following God in every stage in life.

I bring that up because the title of the book directly relates to the call of God to Abram and the state of his life. God is basically telling Abram:

Go this way for a long time; trust me for a long time. I will show you bits and pieces along the way, your faith will grow, many things will occur you never expected, but the whole story you may not see until later. Have a long obedience in the same direction.

At the end of this section, Abram and his family began moving again. Taking the journey of faith with God one step at a time, not exactly knowing where he would end up. Left foot, right foot.

As the pastor and Theologian Tim Keller puts it:

“God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows.”

The faithfulness of God to Abram spurred his faithfulness to God. God overlooks Abram’s disregard of his provision, and didn’t alter his plan to make good on the promise he made to Abram. Abram doesn’t have all the answers, and may not have received exactly what he wanted yet, but God’s presence and promise is enough for him to keep going.

Ministry Time Application:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Lectio Divina – The Divine Word

This is a practice utilized by Christians for centuries, pioneered by St. Ignatius, which allows us to engage with God’s word in a unique way.

Leader (or someone who has a great reading voice): Re-read the entire passage (12:9-20) slowly, with inflection. As the passage is being read, members of the group put down their bibles, close their eyes, and listen intently. Allow the scenes to be played in your mind, imagining yourself in the story. What words or phrases out to you? What are you feeling and experiencing in your body? Allow yourself to relax and just listen.

Sit quietly after the passage is read for about 30 seconds, and then ask your group to share what they heard or felt.

Leader: end your time with a prayer for the group, asking for God to increase your faith and ability to have open hands in front of him, taking whatever comes and releasing control of your lives to him, and courage to not give up when you are faced with difficulty.

Option 2:

Have writing utensils note cards/paper available for your group.

It might be good to play some instrumental music/soft worship during this time, either on your phone or if you have a worship leader in your group that can play on her/his guitar/instrument.

Take a couple of minutes to ask God where in your life you may be trying to take control and therefore don't fully trust him. Is there anything that you need to release your grip on and give over to God? Write these things down.

Break into smaller groups of two or three to pray through the things you wrote down. Remember, God's faithfulness to us is not dictated by our faithfulness to him. He is good despite us. We can trust that he will love us and take care of us when we release control and give more of ourselves over to him.

Week 3



Faith in God's Provision

Genesis 13

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through, so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background:

Abram and his family were semi-nomadic as we have already seen in the last two weeks. They travel! One of the reasons for this is that they were livestock herders. Successful herding required setting out your animals where water could be found. The hotter and dryer months would force one to move grazing to higher elevations where grass still thrives and springs can be found. In the cold wet months, herders would bring their animals down onto the plains. The shifting from place to place created extended periods of time where herders were away from their home communities. This disconnected lifestyle led to nomadic territorial disputes where resources were few.

Bible Verses

Genesis 13

1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2 Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord. 5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. 8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Starter Questions:

Have you ever had an emergency expense that left you wondering how you would pay for it? How did you handle the situation?

Have you heard a promise from God for your life, but are still waiting for it to come to pass? What sort of challenges have you faced during your experience?

Opening Prayer *In your prayer thank God for the people who came and for all of the blessings He has provided for us.*

Discussion and Questions:

Abram had been on a journey: after being called by God to leave his country, people and father's household (Gen. 12:1-3) he went through Canaan all the way to Egypt, and was now on his way back. He had been promised great blessings from God and even shown the land he was to be given – the Promised Land – but not yet allowed to take possession of it. Abram knew God would provide for him and his descendants, but he didn't know when.

In this week's passage, we meet up with Abram and his nephew Lot as they return to Canaan and attempt to settle there. When challenges arise, the two men show us different ways we can react when it comes to having faith in God's provision.

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

- At the beginning of the passage, what is Abram's status like?

10 Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorroah.)

11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12

Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

-He is wealthy, with lots of livestock and gold and silver.

- What happens when Abram and his nephew Lot attempt to live near one another?

-There isn't enough fertile land to support both of their large flocks of livestock, so their field hands begin fighting over whose animals get to graze.

- Who decides to end the quarreling between the two camps?

-Abram.

- What does he propose that they do?

-He suggests that the two part ways.

Despite being the elder and entitled to first choice, Abram gives Lot the option to pick which part of the land he'd like to settle in.

- What does this gesture say to you about Abram's character?

-Answers will vary: it may show his generosity, his humility, his aversion to conflict, his maturity, etc.

- Could anyone share about someone that they know who acts like Abram in this passage? Maybe share a story about how they gave up their rights or choices to someone else?
- Do you think that our society mirrors putting others first in this way? Why or Why not?

Tips

These questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks, and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

- What does Lot do when given the opportunity to choose a new land in which to live?

-He looks around and finds the best piece of land (in v. 10 the plain of the Jordan is described as "like the garden of the Lord," or the most like Paradise) and claims it for himself.

When given the choice, Lot picked the best parcel of land for himself, with little regard for what his uncle might need.

- What does this say to you about Lot's character? How does it compare to Abram's?

-While Abram chose to put his family first by offering to settle the dispute and graciously offering the younger man first choice, Lot chose to put his own comfort and prosperity before his family. This action might show Lot's selfishness, greed, etc.

- Near what two famous locations did Abram and Lot eventually pitch their tents?

-Abram lived near Canaan, while Lot lived near Sodom.

According to v. 13, what was the culture of the city of Sodom like? (The men there were wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord.)

Notes

Lot chose to live in what seemed like the most fertile and perfect land, but found himself neighboring a city that was full of destruction.

- Have you ever been captivated by an option or opportunity that turned out to be unwise in hindsight? If you feel comfortable, share with the group how you discovered it was unwise and how you got out of it.

Abram could have claimed the best part of the land for himself, especially since God had already told him about the Promised Land (see Genesis 12), but waited instead.

- Have you ever resisted something tempting because it didn't feel like God's plan?
- What are common thought processes when we weigh our life plans or major decisions? What common anxieties arise? How does faith and faithful friends effect us in times like these?
- What happens to Abram after Lot leaves to settle down in another land?

-God speaks to Abram and promises him an expanse of land and countless offspring.

- What does Abram do in response?

-He builds an altar to the Lord.

- How do we respond when we believe God has answered a prayer or given us a sign? Are we consistent in our responses?

Notes

Because Abram was faithful in waiting to take possession of the land God promised him, he was able to experience an even greater promise that God had in store for him.

- How does faith in God's provision allow you to walk away from lucrative opportunities that come with strings attached (for example, the fertile plain of the Jordan, but next to wicked Sodom)?
- Have you ever had an experience when waiting or passing something up that seemed great at the time led to an even better situation later? What did you learn from the experience?

When it comes to having faith in God's provision, we can choose to respond in two different ways: Like Lot, who looked for the best benefit now despite its shortcomings, or like Abram, who looked at the big picture and put other's needs first while trusting God to fulfill his promise.

Ministry Time Application

In Matthew 6:26, Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" This verse is a reminder that God wants to provide for us — although it may happen differently than we expected, and on a different timeframe.

Option 1:

It is important to ask ourselves this question: Do I truly believe that God will provide for me? When faced with hard times it is easy to look for the best solution for ourselves (as Lot did) rather than wait for God (as Abram did). For ministry time tonight, play some quiet music while spending 5-8 minutes (whatever is comfortable for your group) individually reading Matthew 6:25-34, focusing on God's promised provision for us. After the time of scripture reading, break into pairs or groups of three and share any insights you may have gained from the passage before praying with one another for the faith to believe in God's provision during hard times.

Option 2:

What have you been waiting on God to provide for you? Is there a dream, vision, calling, or desire that has been on your heart for a long time that you are still waiting to see come to fruition? Abram received God's call that he would become the father of a great nation at age 75 (Gen. 12:1-4) but it would be another 25 years before his son Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5). We have all heard the platitude that things are better in God's perfect timing, but it can be hard to stay faithful when we are the ones spending a long time waiting for the moment to be perfect. For tonight's ministry time, have some writing materials available for each person and spend 5-8 minutes writing a letter to God about this thing you have been waiting on. Then, break into pairs or groups of three and share what you've been waiting on, and what sort of emotion came across in your letter (you don't have to share the letter itself): anger, frustration, exhaustion, joy, etc. Pray with one another about this

thing you are waiting for God to provide, asking that God meet you where you are and give you greater faith to continue waiting.

Week 4



Saving Faith

Genesis 15:1-6, Romans 4:2-3, 18-24

Tip: The starter questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks, and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

Background:

Abram found himself in his late 70s and had not made any progress in furthering his lineage. He had moved when God told him to move and listened when God told him about the land his family would inherit, but not yet. He was getting up in his years and began wondering when all of the things God had promised to him would actually happen. He had a couple of options: to take matters into his own hands, or to put his faith in God.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever bought something (furniture, toys, etc.) that needed assembled and tried to put it together without the instructions? How did it turn out?

What are your habits when you are waiting? Waiting in a lobby for your family doctor? Waiting in line? Waiting

Bible Verses:
Genesis 15:1-6

1 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2 But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

for something to be delivered? Waiting for your food to arrive at a restaurant? What are your patterns while waiting?

It is human nature to want to plan ahead and know how our future is going to turn out. From five-year plans to astrological horoscopes, we've been trying to anticipate what the future holds for centuries. We follow a God who has a plan, both for the world at large and for our own personal lives. Sometimes He decides to share insights to his plan with us — and sometimes those plans sound unbelievable.

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

Prior to this chapter where Abram talks with God, he had fought and defeated a group of kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot, and refused to take any of the spoils, as he had made an oath to God.

- How does God respond to Abram's actions and decision?

He speaks to Abram and tells him not to be afraid, and that He is Abram's shield and reward.

- For the first time in Abram's journey, he starts a conversation with God after he hears God's voice. What topic does Abram bring up?

2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” 23 The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

-The fact that he does not have an heir and one of his servants will have to inherit his wealth.

In the original language, the question Abram asks of God — “What can you give me since I remain childless?” — is in a rhetorical tone. God has just told Abram that He is his great reward, and Abram essentially says, “What reward compares to that of a child, and what good are rewards if I don’t have an heir to share them with?”

- Have you ever wanted something so badly that it clouded your ability to see the other blessings (rewards) in your life? If you feel comfortable, would you share how you came to your senses or began to see the blessings in your life again?
- Has wanting something that you see others have made you jealous or alter your behavior towards them?
- In verses 2-3, who does Abram say will inherit his wealth?

-His servant, Eliezer of Damascus

- By this point in his life, God had already told Abram twice that he would have many offspring (see Gen. 12: 2-3, 13:16). Why do you think Abram was instead planning to give his estate to Eliezer?

-It had been a long time since Abram had first heard these promises, and he was beginning to lose hope that they would actually happen.

Instead, Abram started working out a Plan B in case God didn't follow through with his word.

- Have you ever found yourself trying to speed up God's timing by attempting to take matters into your own hands when His promise didn't happen fast enough? What happened?
- After listening to Abram's laments at being childless, how does God respond?

-He tells Abram he will indeed have an heir, and reminds him again how vast his offspring will be.

- Hearing for a third time how numerous his offspring will be, how does Abram react? He had heard it before, what is different?

-He believes God.

It is said that having a relationship with God based on faith means having a heartfelt inner confidence that God is who he says he is and does what he says he will do.

- Have you ever, like Abram, struggled to have complete confidence that God will do what he says he will do?

It took years and hearing from God three separate times before Abram fully comprehended God's promise and believed that it would come true. Do you think this same pattern has happened with you and God? Think back and maybe share a situation where it took several encounters with God before you believed him about something. Share that with the group!

Notes

- What happens when Abram finally believes the Lord?

-His faith is credited to him as righteousness.

In the New Living Translation, Gen. 15:6 reads “the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.” In other words, Abram’s trust and belief in God was enough to make him right in God’s eyes.

- How does it make you feel to know that you can be made righteous before God by believing him?

-Feelings could include relief that it can’t be earned, humility, grace, etc.

Much later, in his letter to the Romans, Paul would cite this passage as an example of why it is faith that earns us right standing before God, not the doing of good deeds.

Read Romans 4:2-3, 18, 20-24.

- According to v. 2, what would Abram/Abraham have been entitled to had he been made righteous by works?

-Boasting in his own accomplishments.

- Based on Paul’s explanation in the latter part of the chapter, how does Abram/Abraham’s righteousness before God also apply to us today?

-By believing in Jesus, we will also be credited with righteousness.

Notes

Righteousness, as Abram discovered, wasn't something that could be earned by doing good works, but could be gifted by God for having faith. Today, when we believe, an exchange takes place when we put our faith in Christ and He gives us forgiveness and in return. Just like Abram, when we believe the Lord, it is credited to us as righteousness.

Ministry Time Application

Option 1:

Do you struggle to think that maybe you don't have enough faith to be saved? The beauty of God's grace is that we only need the tiniest amount of faith (Matthew 17:20) to gain righteousness, because it isn't what we do that makes us right with God, it is the fact that he loves us back infinitely more that saves us. For ministry time tonight, set aside some time for individual prayer.

Encourage group members to pray about believing God, trusting that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do, and praising him for being the kind of God who loves us and keeps his word.

Option 2:

Is there a promise or calling you've heard from God multiple times, but still have a hard time believing to be true? You aren't alone — Abram, the man often described as the father of our faith, experienced the same thing. It can be tempting to look for a Plan B in order to quicken the coming of God's promises. During ministry time tonight, split into pairs or groups of three and share any areas of your life where you are struggling to believe that God will follow through with his promise. Then, pray for one another, asking God for

patience and increased faith to believe that what He says is true and eventually come to pass, and to resist the temptation to forge your own path.

Week 5



Faith to Wait

Genesis 16

****You will need materials for Ministry Time this week.**

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

The series we're currently walking through as a church is called "Journey of Faith." Faith is essential to a healthy walk with God, and it's not simply an attribute or skill you gain and then check off a checklist. Faith is not something you only use when you first decide to accept God, it's something you call upon during every part of your journey with him. What's more, the faith you exhibit at the beginning of your journey may look radically different than the faith you gain as you grow along the way. The book of Genesis is the beginning of the story of God's relationship with his people, and there are countless times in this book when the people are called to have faith in God, with varying results.

Genesis 16

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." 6 "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 7 The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

Today we'll be looking at a chapter that displays the consequences of not having faith in God. In Genesis 15, God promises Abram that a son "coming from [his] own body" would be his heir, and tells Abram that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars. Chapter 16 demonstrates the difficulties of waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled when the outcome he promised doesn't look likely.

Starter Questions: *These questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks, and remember, there are no wrong opinions.*

Do you find it difficult or easy to be patient? Why?

What does it take for you to be able to trust someone completely?

Has there ever been a time when you didn't trust someone, only to end up wishing that you had?

Opening Prayer Thank God for the people in attendance and ask him to bless the teaching and your time together.

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- What is the problem Sarai faces in the beginning of this chapter?

-She hasn't had any children.

10 The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

- Why might this problem be of great concern to Sarai?
 - You can mention that women at this time obtained honor through marriage and children, but a simpler answer might be that Sarai wanted a family. Moreover, God had promised her one, and the older Sarai got, the more remote the possibility seemed.
- Whom does Sarai blame for her problem?
 - The Lord. Verse 7: "The Lord has kept me from having children."
- Blaming God for our situation or problems doesn't always look as blatant as saying out loud "God is to blame!" What are some ways we express frustration with God or blame him for problems that are not as obvious as Sarai's?
 - We give God the "silent treatment", we rebel, we stop giving our tithe or redistribute our wealth away from his purposes to another, we escape to friends or use them as counselors, etc.
- What is Sarai's plan for her problem?
 - She gave Abram her maidservant Hagar to be his wife so he could sleep with her and bear children.
- What do Sarai and Abram's reactions to Sarai's infertility say about their faith?

-Even though Sarai blamed the Lord for her infertility, she obviously didn't trust him to cure it; in agreeing to do what Sarai asked of him, Abram lacked faith in God as well.

- Who does Sarai blame for her difficulty with Hagar?

-Abram. Verse 5: "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms..."

Before we pass to much judgment on Sarai, we want to be sensitive to her situation. She packed up and moved with her husband to a foreign land, went through the messy lies with the king in Egypt, is being told she's going to be the mother to nations at a very old age with no kids, and is experiencing some of the consequences of a bad decision.

She is not in a good place. I am sure we can all relate a bit to her situation. She continues to mess up by mistreating Hagar. Hagar wants to flee.

- Have you ever been mistreated and your first reaction or "gut reaction" was to flee? If you feel comfortable, share whether or not you fled and how it worked out.
- What do Abram, Sarai, and Hagar have in common when it comes to their actions in this story?

-All three are reacting and blaming rather than believing. Sarai reacts to her infertility and then blames Abram; Abram takes absolutely no responsibility

for what happens; Hagar obeys Abram, despises Sarai, and runs.

- What virtue are they missing? In other words, if Sarai and Abram would simply _____, then they would see that God is faithful and keeps his promises.
- What is hard about waiting?
- Why do you think we want patience, but avoid or disdain the situations that build that character trait?
- How can small group and trusted friends help us in our desire to be patient and wait on God?
- What are some ways that you should have waited, but acted to quickly or took bad advice and made a hasty decision? Were you listening to wise friends who knew you?
- Are you aware of any signs or patterns in your decision making? Have there been repeated negative consequences in your life because of your refusal to wait on God?
- Who is a model in your life for patience?

Ministry Time Application

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you'd like everyone to write down at least one area in

their lives where they feel they need more faith in God. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have everyone pray specifically about the items on each other’s lists.

Option 2:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you’d like everyone to write down at least one area in their lives where they feel they need more faith in God or need to wait on God. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Explain that the group will sit in silence for another three minutes, and this time you’d like everyone to write down at least one time in the past when God has been faithful to them.

Step 4: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 5: Ask if anyone would like to share the areas where they lack faith or are impatient with God/others, or the times when they experienced the Lord's faithfulness. This is strictly voluntary, and an opportunity for the group to lift each other up both in weakness and blessing. Open this up for discussion only if you feel your group would be comfortable with it.

Step 6: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. Instruct everyone to both praise God for the times of faithfulness on everyone's list, as well as praying for faith in the areas people listed. quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

Week 6



Faith in God's Promises

Genesis 17:1-23

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

At ninety, Abram has been walking with God for decades. With each season that is recorded in the Bible, Abram and Sarai are learning and experiencing the many facets of faith. Genesis 17 reveals a powerful and culturally significant encounter with God. Names carried great weight and significance in the ancient world. If one was to give a name to another, one was thought to have power and authority over them. Giving them a new identity. For instance, Adam was said to have given names to the animals. Then it is said he and Eve had authority over them and they were to rule over them. Modern culture, particularly in the West, typically sees a surname as associative (clan, family) rather than identity or authoritative.

Bible Verses:

Genesis 17:1-23

Week 6

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. 2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." 3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." 9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

Starter Questions:

What is something you are looking forward to right now?

Have you ever saved up your money for a long time for a single thing? What was it and how did you feel when you were finally able to purchase it?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- How old was Abram/Abraham when God appears to him? Why might this be significant that he was so old?

-99 years old, to demonstrate that surely this was a miracle that no one could deny
- What is your perception of the old? What place and role do you see them filling in your life today? Feel free to be honest and share.

24 years prior to this, God promised Abram that He would make his people into a "great nation". At age 85, God tells Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. When God tells Abram again that he will father a great nation he responds in faith and believes God.

11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” 15 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” 17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” 18 And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!” 19 Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.

- Would you believe God in this situation? Why or why not? What are the biggest barriers to believing God in a situation like this?

-Worn out body, barren wife past child bearing days, patient waiting for decades and nothing yet

- What do you think your biggest barriers are in regards to trusting God’s promises and miraculous actions?
- When God is making this covenant with Abram, God changes his name to Abraham, and He renames Sarai, Sarah. Why is this significant?

-In Hebrew culture, your name reflected your identity. (Abram in Hebrew means “exalted father”, Abraham means “father of a multitude”. Sarai means “argumentative/quarrelsome”, Sarah means “princess”. God reidentified this couple in their old age relative to this single promise!

- In what ways can God’s promises change our identity?

-If we anticipate His promises, we can live hopefully and faithfully. If we believe His Kingdom will come, we can “store our treasures in heaven”, now. Matt 6:20

- What did God command Abraham to do in order to receive this promise?

I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” 22 When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him. 23 On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him.

-He and every male among him must be circumcised.

- Any ideas as to why might God require Abraham’s and his descendants’ allegiance in order to fulfill His promises to them?

-This type of covenant is known in antiquity as a Suzerain-vassal covenant, which regulated the relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings. The great king claimed absolute sovereignty and loyalty, that vassal must “love” the suzerain. In turn the great king would protect the subject and their realm. The reward of this covenant is great, but it comes at a cost.

- How does Abraham first respond to God’s promise to him?

-He is incredulous, laughing because it seems too good to be true)

- Have you ever looked at a situation and thought, “It can only end badly or there is no way this can turn out good...” yet later it did turn out good? Share with the group if you have!
- Can you relate to Abraham’s response here? Is there anything about God’s promises to us, or the Gospel itself that seems “too good to be true”?
- How do we know that Abraham had faith that God would keep His promise?

-Abraham immediately responded. “On that very day...” Abraham sprang into action due to his faith

- How can we as a group encourage each other regarding trusting the promises of God? What are some promises that God has made in the Bible that you rarely think about or act on? What are some that you are fearful to act on?

Ministry Time Application

Let’s read a passage together a final passage on faith from Paul to the church in Corinth:

READ 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Option 1:

Partner up with 1 or 2 others and invite the Holy Spirit to show you ways He wants to renew you tomorrow, and the following day. Invite His grace and thanksgiving in your life.

Option 2:

Provide the group with pens and paper. After reading the above passage, have your group silently reflect on what stands out to them in this passage. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide them to the parts of the text that speak most clearly to them. You may ask them to consider what actions their faith might lead them to, how God is currently renewing them in this season, or to imagine the eternal glory that is currently unseen.



Ministry Time

Series: The Journey of Faith

Read through all of the Ministry Time ideas for each week before you begin teaching through the series. This will help you plan and pray for stronger impact! Blessings!

Week 1:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Write down anything in your life that may be difficult for you to walk away from if God were to tell you to “go.” Is there anything that may take the place of God’s call? Would you refuse to leave that thing, hobby, person behind? Break down into groups of two or three to pray together and offer our lists up to God. He desires our whole hearts, free from distraction and weight, to listen and respond to him.

Option 2:

If your group is comfortable practicing “waiting on the Lord” in silence, this would be a good time to engage in that. Take 2-3 minutes in silence, listening to God, and not writing anything. After that time, have each person write on one side of the page things that is holding you back from following God. This could be fear, not hearing anything from him at all, worry, anxiety, anger, things you can’t let go of, etc. On the other side, write down what areas in your life you want to hear God say,

“go.” Break down into smaller groups of two or three to pray through these things.

Week 2:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Lectio Divina – The Divine Word

This is a practice utilized by Christians for centuries, pioneered by St. Ignatius, which allows us to engage with God’s word in a unique way.

Leader (or someone who has a great reading voice): Re-read the entire passage (12:9-20) slowly, with inflection. As the passage is being read, members of the group put down their bibles, close their eyes, and listen intently. Allow the scenes to be played in your mind, imagining yourself in the story. What words or phrases out to you? What are you feeling and experiencing in your body? Allow yourself to relax and just listen.

Sit quietly after the passage is read for about 30 seconds, and then ask your group to share what they heard or felt.

Leader: end your time with a prayer for the group, asking for God to increase your faith and ability to have open hands in front of him, taking whatever comes and releasing control of your lives to him, and courage to not give up when you are faced with difficulty.

Option 2:

Have writing utensils note cards/paper available for your group.

It might be good to play some instrumental music/soft worship during this time, either on your phone or if you have a worship leader in your group that can play on her/his guitar/instrument.

Take a couple of minutes to ask God where in your life you may be trying to take control and therefore don't fully trust him. Is there anything that you need to release your grip on and give over to God? Write these things down.

Break into smaller groups of two or three to pray through the things you wrote down. Remember, God's faithfulness to us is not dictated by our faithfulness to him. He is good despite us. We can trust that he will love us and take care of us when we release control and give more of ourselves over to him.

Week 3:

In Matthew 6:26, Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" This verse is a reminder that God wants to provide for us — although it may happen differently than we expected, and on a different timeframe.

Option 1:

It is important to ask ourselves this question: Do I truly believe that God will provide for me? When faced with

hard times it is easy to look for the best solution for ourselves (as Lot did) rather than wait for God (as Abram did). For ministry time tonight, play some quiet music while spending 5-8 minutes (whatever is comfortable for your group) individually reading Matthew 6:25-34, focusing on God's promised provision for us. After the time of scripture reading, break into pairs or groups of three and share any insights you may have gained from the passage before praying with one another for the faith to believe in God's provision during hard times.

Option 2:

What have you been waiting on God to provide for you? Is there a dream, vision, calling, or desire that has been on your heart for a long time that you are still waiting to see come to fruition? Abram received God's call that he would become the father of a great nation at age 75 (Gen. 12:1-4) but it would be another 25 years before his son Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5). We have all heard the platitude that things are better in God's perfect timing, but it can be hard to stay faithful when we are the ones spending a long time waiting for the moment to be perfect. For tonight's ministry time, have some writing materials available for each person and spend 5-8 minutes writing a letter to God about this thing you have been waiting on. Then, break into pairs or groups of three and share what you've been waiting on, and what sort of emotion came across in your letter (you don't have to share the letter itself): anger, frustration, exhaustion, joy, etc. Pray with one another about this thing you are waiting for God to provide, asking that

God meet you where you are and give you greater faith to continue waiting.

Week 4:

Option 1:

Do you struggle to think that maybe you don't have enough faith to be saved? The beauty of God's grace is that we only need the tiniest amount of faith (Matthew 17:20) to gain righteousness, because it isn't what we do that makes us right with God, it is the fact that he loves us back infinitely more that saves us. For ministry time tonight, set aside some time for individual prayer.

Encourage group members to pray about believing God, trusting that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do, and praising him for being the kind of God who loves us and keeps his word.

Option 2:

Is there a promise or calling you've heard from God multiple times, but still have a hard time believing to be true? You aren't alone — Abram, the man often described as the father of our faith, experienced the same thing. It can be tempting to look for a Plan B in order to quicken the coming of God's promises. During ministry time tonight, split into pairs or groups of three and share any areas of your life where you are struggling to believe that God will follow through with his promise. Then, pray for one another, asking God for patience and increased faith to believe that what He says is true and eventually come to pass, and to resist the temptation to forge your own path.

Week 5:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you'd like everyone to write down at least one area in their lives where they feel they need more faith in God. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: "Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us."

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have everyone pray specifically about the items on each other's lists.

Option 2:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you'd like everyone to write down at least one area in their lives where they feel they need more faith in God or need to wait on God. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: "Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us."

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Explain that the group will sit in silence for another three minutes, and this time you'd like everyone to write down at least one time in the past when God has been faithful to them.

Step 4: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 5: Ask if anyone would like to share the areas where they lack faith or are impatient with God/others, or the times when they experienced the Lord's faithfulness. This is strictly voluntary, and an opportunity for the group to lift each other up both in weakness and blessing. Open this up for discussion only if you feel your group would be comfortable with it.

Step 6: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. Instruct everyone to both praise God for the times of faithfulness on everyone's list, as well as praying for faith in the areas people listed. quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

Week 6:

Let's read a passage together a final passage on faith from Paul to the church in Corinth:

READ 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."
Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise

us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Option 1:

Partner up with 1 or 2 others and invite the Holy Spirit to show you ways He wants to renew you tomorrow, and the following day. Invite His grace and thanksgiving in your life.

Option 2:

Provide the group with pens and paper. After reading the above passage, have your group silently reflect on what stands out to them in this passage. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide them to the parts of the text that speak most clearly to them. You may ask them to consider what actions their faith might lead them to, how God is currently renewing them in this season, or to imagine the eternal glory that is currently unseen.