

# Series Based Bible Study



*Part 2 of 2*

Vineyard Columbus

November 2016

# 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 **last 5 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.”

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### **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](mailto:smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org)

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## **Week 7**



# Faith to Wrestle with God

## Genesis 18

**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.

### **Background:**

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. Today we'll be looking

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 3 He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." 7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. 9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said.

at a chapter that depicts a very personal dialogue between Abraham and God, and explores the nature of Abraham's faith in who God is in contrast to the faith of his wife, Sarah.

### **Starter Questions:**

Complete this sentence: "Those who know me well know that I'm..."

Is it easier for you to challenge someone you know well, or a total stranger?

How do you react when God seems to be telling you something that doesn't make sense?

**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:**

- Why do you think God chose to appear to Abraham in the way he did?

-It was customary in the time of Abraham for all visitors to a dwelling to be offered the opportunity to eat and to rest. You may want to discuss whether God appearing in this way gave Abraham a concrete way to serve or fellowship with Him

10 Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" 13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." 16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

- What does the meal Abraham provides say about his generosity?

-He provides his visitors a "choice, tender calf," which would not be a regular meal item.

- Do you think there's a difference in the generosity we should have toward others and the generosity we should have toward the Lord?

- What did God predict for Sarah?

-She'd have a baby within a year's time

- What was Sarah's reaction to this news?

-She laughed to herself because she thought she wouldn't have children at her age, and then she lied about laughing when the Lord called her on it, because she was afraid.

- Do you think you would have reacted the way Sarah did? Why or why not?
- What do you think Sarah's actions in this chapter say about her relationship with God?
- What does God reveal to Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah?

-The Lord will judge the city for its sin.



20 Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." 22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26 The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

- What is Abraham's reaction to this news?
  - He bargains with the Lord to save the city even if there are only ten righteous people in it.
- What basis does Abraham use for arguing that the Lord should spare the city?
  - Instead of simply saying what he wants from the Lord, Abraham appeals to the Lord's nature. He argues that sweeping away the righteous with the wicked would not be in keeping with the righteousness of who God is.
- What strikes you about the nature of this conversation between Abraham and God?
  - Throughout their dialogue, Abraham is humble, saying he is nothing but dust and ashes, and repeatedly asking the Lord not to be angry. He realizes he is in no position to demand anything of God.
- Why do you think Abraham was able to question God as he did?
- Why do you think God responded the way he did?
- Do you think you're more like Sarah or Abraham in your reaction to God?

29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." 32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." 33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

### **Ministry Time Application:**

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

#### **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've lacked faith in God, like Sarah, and an area where they need to question God in faith, like Abraham. 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've lacked faith in God, like Sarah, and an area where they need to question God in faith, like Abraham. 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 pray to God and wait on his Spirit regarding the items written on the cards.

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 what they’ve written on their cards, or what God has spoken to them during this ministry time. 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, and have everyone pray specifically about the items on each other’s lists.

## **Week 8**



# When Faith Gives Way

Genesis 20

## Background:

### 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.

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

Temptation is near to all of us — even the revered heroes of faith we find in the Bible. After all, the people we read about in scripture were only human, like us, with struggles and weaknesses of their own. Thankfully, God has a history of using struggling people like ourselves for His good. In this chapter we find Abraham in a predicament much like one he had experienced earlier in his life and faced with the opportunity to either trust God's provision or to look out for himself.

## Starter Questions:

Have you ever found yourself making the same mistakes over and over, or noticed the same temptations cropping

1 Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, 2 and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

3 But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."

4 Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

8 Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid.

up again and again in your life? Were you able to break out of the cycle, or is it still a challenge in your life?

Have you ever told a "little white lie" or a lie by omission that seemed like a good idea at the time but came back to haunt you later? How did this effect both you and the other people in the situation?

**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

- Abraham takes his household and moves south to a new region. What lie does he tell there?  
-He calls his wife Sarah his sister.
- What happens to Sarah as a result?  
-The king sends for her and takes her.
- This story may sound familiar: almost the exact same situation played out when Abraham (then Abram) took his household to Egypt over 25 years before back in Genesis 12. Do you remember what happened the first time Abraham tried this trick?  
-Abram was treated well and gained wealth as a result of the alliance made by his "sister" becoming part of the Pharaoh's harem, but the Pharaoh's household suffered from disease until

9 Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done." 10 And Abimelek asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

11 Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'

12 Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me:

Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'

14 Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelek said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."

the deception was found out and Abram and Sarai were sent away.

- Abraham surely remembered that things had not gone well the first time he tried this ruse. Have you ever tried to re-use a failed plan, in hopes that it would go well the next time? Did it ever work out in your favor?
- God confronts one of the men in this story about the situation through a dream. To whom does he appear?

-The king, Abimelek.

- What are some reasons why you think God may have appeared to Abimelek instead of Abraham, a prophet?

-Possible reasons could include: God wanted to prevent the king from sinning, God wanted to make his presence known to a kingdom who didn't know him, Abraham may not have been receptive to God's intervention.

- What does Abimelek do as a result of this dream from God?

-He follows God's instructions to return Sarah to Abraham.

- Abimelek confronts Abraham and asks him to explain why he lied about his marriage to Sarah. What does Abraham give as his reasoning?

-He explains that he was afraid he would be killed in order for the king to take his

16 To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels[a] of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."  
 17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, 18 for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

wife, so he instructed Sarah to lie about her status.

In verse 11, Abraham confesses that he believed there was "no fear of God in this land," meaning he assumed that the king was wicked and would not treat him well. He decided to look out for himself rather than have faith that God was in control of the situation.

- Have you ever, like Abraham, made an assumption about another person and treated them in a way they did not deserve? How did you handle the situation? How did it affect your relationship with that person?
- When Abraham is confronted for treating the king unfairly, he tries to shift the blame by explaining that what he told the king wasn't technically a lie (see v. 12). Have you ever been tempted to tell a half-truth in order to get out of a sticky situation?
- How does Abimelek respond to Abraham's explanation?

-He gives Abraham gifts of livestock and slaves, returns his wife, and offers him land on which to live.

- Why do you think the king acts this way?  
 -Answers could include: Abimelek was a much more honorable ruler than Abraham had expected, he believed the warnings God had given him in the dream, he was empathetic towards Abraham's plight and fear of death, he knew Abraham was a prophet and should be treated with respect.



**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.

Up until this point in the story, Sarah has been treated as a pawn between the two men. How do you think she feels about what is going on around her?

(Note that by this point in her life, Sarah had taken up nomadic living with her husband and moved multiple times, had been in this same situation in the Egyptian Pharaoh's harem (Genesis 12), been promised a son that still hadn't come (Genesis 15), given her servant Hagar to Abram and watched her bear him a son (Genesis 16), laughed at the Lord's messengers (Genesis 18) and was now over 90 years old.)

In verse 16, the king turns to Sarah personally and explains that she is absolved from any responsibility in the matter and that he will pay her husband an amount symbolic of a dowry as proof that he had not dishonored or offended her. How do you think this treatment might have effected Sarah, especially considering how unfavored she felt (see Genesis 16:2) due to being unable to have Abraham's heir?

Have you ever been in Abimelek's shoes, where you were the innocent party that had been wronged? Were you able to react with the same type of grace Abimelek showed Abraham and Sarah, or more like the Pharaoh from chapter 12 that angrily sent them away from his kingdom?

- At the end of the chapter, what happens after Abraham prays on behalf of the king, as God instructed in the dream?

-The entire household is healed so that they are able to bear children again.

When Abraham told the lie that his wife was only his sister, he did so out of a selfish effort to keep himself from being killed, with little regard for what might happen to Sarah when they were separated or what might befall the king's household (remember that there had been a disease in Pharaoh's household in Genesis 12 because of his lies).

- When faced with an unknown or uncomfortable situation, we can be tempted to look out for ourselves rather than take into consideration how it might effect those around us. What are some practical ways in which we can put into practice resisting that temptation and thinking of others before ourselves?

### **Ministry Time Application:**

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

#### **Option 1:**

Consider an area in your life where you continue to make the same mistakes or are faced with the same temptations over and over again. For this week's ministry time, take a few moments to think about why these might keep happening (could it be due to a lack of wisdom, faith, discipline, etc.?). Then, set a timer for 3-5 minutes and spend some time praying individually, asking God to reveal the source of the mistakes and temptations, and to ask for his help in overcoming them through an increased amount of faith.

### Option 2:

Like Abraham, we have a tendency to look out for ourselves when facing temptation, rather than considering those around us. As a result we can end up hurting others, or risk being hurt ourselves by someone who hasn't considered how it would effect us. Is there someone that you have wronged, or who has wronged you, due to giving into the temptation to look out for yourself rather than have faith that God will come through? Take some time to think about a specific situation before breaking into pairs or groups of three and praying about how you can ask for forgiveness or forgive the person who wronged you.

## **Week 9**



# Faith to Meet Life's Challenges

Genesis 21:1-21

**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:**

The Bible tell us that God has promised to meet our needs, “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus,” (Phil 4:19). The Bible also tells us that there are conditions to this promise. One of the conditions for this promise is that you have to trust him. The more you trust God, the more God is able to meet needs in your life.

## **Starter Questions:**

How can you learn to trust God more so he can meet all of your needs?

How can you learn to have greater faith?

Bible Verses: Genesis 21:1-21

1 Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. 4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." 7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. 9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." offspring."

**Opening Prayer:** Thank God for the people who came and for all of the blessings He has provided for us.

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

**Discussion and Questions:**

In his mercy, the Lord visited Sarah. Isaac was born by virtue of God's promise. It was not by the power of common providence, but by the power of a special promise that Isaac was born. Sarah by faith received strength to conceive. (Heb. 11:11) Both Abraham and Sarah were old and beyond the age of natural conception. But God was faithful to His promise, His faithfulness sustains and strengthens His people's faith. God's promises never fail. Some promises of God are conditional and depend on something we must do. But other promises of God are unconditional, and God will fulfill them not because of what we do, but because of who He is. (Eph. 3:20; 2 Sam. 7:18, 19)

- How long did it take for God's promise to be fulfilled?
- Identify and discuss Sarah and Abraham's challenges to God's promise of the birth of a son. How did each one respond? What was the affect of their response to Isaac's name? (Gen. 17:17-19 and 18:12-15)
- Identify and discuss the ways God's fulfillment of the promise bolstered the faith of both Sarah and Abraham. (Genesis 21:2-7)

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. 13 I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba. 15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob. 17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

- Discuss promises in the Bible that God has fulfilled, not based on what we do but based on who he is. Relate these promises to promises that have been fulfilled within your own life.
- Our lives are full of challenges. Discuss a time when you have become discouraged or impatient waiting for a prayer to be answered. How did you feel after - joyous that God had fulfilled your desire, or convicted by your lack of trust in God's power and promise? (Matt 21:22)

Ishmael mocked, laughed at Isaac (Gen. 21:9) perhaps the meaning of his name (Isaac means laughter) lead Ishmael to this reaction. We often find that those in the world laugh at God's chosen. Sarah said to Abraham, cast out this bondwoman and her son. (Gen 21:10). In Gal 4:22-29 Paul describes a spiritual application of the conflict between Isaac (the son born of the promise) and Ishmael (the son born of the flesh).

- Abraham sought God when challenged to fulfill Sarah's request to expel Ismael and Hagar (Gen. 21:10-11). Discuss Abraham challenges.
- Describe what God directs Abraham to do and why. (Gen. 21:12-14) Have you ever felt God's call directing you to do something you did not want to do?
- Discuss how Abraham demonstrated deep faith in God's promise despite the challenge to cast out his son.

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. 20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. 21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt. (Gen. 21:20-21)

Pharan is a wilderness, very large, desolate, impassable, and without water; from Mount Sinai to Kadeshbarnea, a journey of eleven days. Its land can neither be plowed nor sown. The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael and their subsequent life in the desert of Pharan would force them to acquire survival skills. As a skilled archer, Ishmael could provide food for his family. Pharan seems to be the most general of the names of this very long desert. This is the wilderness the Israelites wandered in thirty-eight years. It must be understood that only some parts of it are completely uninhabited otherwise Ishmael could not have lived in it.

- What was Hagar's challenge?
- How did Hagar and Ishmael demonstrate faith in God?
- What was God's promise to Hagar?
- Have you ever resisted something tempting because it didn't feel like God's plan?
- God saved Hagar and Ishmael, they survived a life in the wilderness. Discuss two things: why would Ishmael become an archer instead of a shepherd? Why did Hagar not turn to the Israelites for a wife for Ishmael?



## Ministry Time Application

### Option 1:

Have the participants use either their journal or a sheet of paper. Ask them to dig into their Bible to discuss and record the verses that show parallels between our Lord Jesus and Isaac.

- Both were the promised sons.
- Both were born after a period of delay.
- Both mothers were assured by God's omnipotence. (Gen. 18:13-14; Luke 1:34, 37)
- Both were given names rich with meaning before they were born.
- Both births occurred at God's appointed time. (Gen. 21:2; Gal. 4:4)
- Both births were miraculous.
- Both births were accompanied by joy. (Gen. 21:6; Luke 1:46-47; 2:10-11)

### Option 2:

Leader: Read Psalm 19:1-4 twice. Ask your group to close their eyes, listen and visualize. Lead your group in a discussion of humility before God in all things put in evangelism in particular.

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
3 They have no speech, they use no words;*

Notes

*no sound is heard from them.*

*4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.*

## **Week 10**



# When Faith is Tested

## Genesis 22

**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:**

Abraham and Sarah have seen the fulfillment of God's promise of a son in Isaac. Now, God tests Abraham's faith once again. As we've seen throughout Abraham's life, God has asked obedience in many areas, and while he has made missteps, when it counts, he trusts in God. In Genesis 22 we will see if he will once again trust in God when things seem impossible. This chapter also foreshadows the covenant God will make with Moses and Israel, as well as the new covenant in Jesus through sacrifice.

### **Starter Questions:**

Have you ever had to give up something that was hard to let go? How were you able to trust God in that situation?

## Bible Verses: Genesis 22

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.

As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Have you ever failed to obey God when you knew you should? What did you learn from it?

What does the word "sacrifice" mean to you?

**Opening Prayer:** Pray that everyone would hear this passage with fresh ears and that each person would hear something that will move them forward in their walk with Christ.

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

## Discussion Questions:

- What did God ask Abraham to do?
  - Abraham is commanded to take Isaac to Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a mountain.
- Is Abraham's response to God's request consistent or inconsistent with his previous actions?
  - Abraham has been tested by God throughout his life, and has always shown faith in God's plans, although from time to time he has tried to "hurry up" God's plans.
- What does Isaac say to Abraham about the offering?
  - Isaac asks where the lamb is.
- What does Abraham's answer to Isaac's question tell you about his faith in God's plans?

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

- He has always trusted that God would be faithful, and in this situation he shows that same trust that God would provide for the sacrifice. He doesn't waver in his belief that God would not allow him to kill his promised son.

- What do you think Isaac was thinking about when Abraham bound him and laid him on the altar?

-Isaac was familiar with animal & likely even human sacrifice, and since he complies, it seems that he accepts his fate up till the final moment before God intervenes. However, even though he is obedient, even to the moment before death, perhaps his thoughts might stray into the territory of wondering about whether his father is really hearing from God, or if God is as good as he has been told.

- What do you think Abraham was thinking about?

- It seems as though Abraham has not resigned himself to losing his son, but has so much faith in God that even up till the final moment he believes God is using this as a test. He has been tested so many times before that this final momentous test of his faith that it seems almost as if he has figured out something of how God is operating in his life.

- Do you believe God would have ever let Abraham go through with the sacrifice of Isaac or was it always his plan to provide a substitute?

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

20 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milkah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22 Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milkah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maakah.

- God's plans are mysterious, but it seems likely that he always intended for this to be a test of Abraham's obedience and not a human sacrifice.

- What happened before Abraham could sacrifice Isaac?

- An angel called out to him to stop, and Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket.

- What does the Angel promise to Abraham after he has sacrificed the ram?

-The Lord will bless him and make his descendants like the stars or the sand, and they will possess the land of their enemies. All nations will be blessed through him.

- The Old Testament law is based on animal sacrifices in place of human lives. An example of this is the Passover lamb, which foreshadows Christ. What do you think is the purpose of sacrifices?

- Animal sacrifice or offerings are representative or substitutionary sacrifices that shed the blood, which represents life. Because of sin, God requires the sacrifice of a life in order for there to be forgiveness of sins.

- Have volunteers read Romans 3:25 and Matthew 20:28. How does Genesis 22 relate to Jesus' death on the cross? Why do we not have animal sacrifices in the church?

Notes

- It is an example of the practice of substitutionary sacrifice, ransom, giving one life to save another. Jesus gave his own perfect life for every life on earth so we would no longer need to kill animals to atone for our sins.
- How are all nations blessed through Abraham's offspring?
  - We are blessed through Jesus' death and resurrection and the spreading of the kingdom of God throughout the world.
- What do we learn about obedience to God through Abraham in this particular story?
  - Obedience often comes at a price, one we aren't always expecting to pay, and one that we may be hesitant to pay. Even when obeying God may be difficult, we should trust that he has our best interest in mind and do what he asks. We don't always know what kind of blessing is in store for us if we obey God.
- What do you think would have happened if Abraham had told God no at the beginning of this story?
  - Follow up questions if people have trouble answering: Would God have rejected Abraham? Would he have gotten through to him another way? Could Isaac have been struck down, making it impossible for God's promise to be fulfilled?



Notes

## Ministry Time Application

### Option 1:

Ask everyone to sit quietly for a few minutes and think of something in their life that is getting in the way of them following Jesus fully. Split up into groups or pairs to pray for one another about having obedience in these areas.

### Option 2:

Alternatively, reflect silently for a few moments on the sacrifice of Jesus. After this, open up a time of praying aloud and go around the group giving thanks to Jesus for giving his life for us. If anyone at your group has not accepted Christ, give an opportunity for them to do so at this time.

## **Week 11**



# Faith for Old Age

## Genesis 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:**

We may not have experienced old age yet, but by God's grace the vast majority of us will. What will we be like then? Will we have laid solid foundations that stand the test of time, with all its ups and downs, successes and failures, joys and heartaches? Will we get to the end of our lives and proclaim, as Paul did, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith?" We pick up Abraham's story in his old age, as he is still exemplifying simple, pure faith and hope all the way to the end. Let us hope to learn and allow God to do the same in us.

1 Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. 2 She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

3 Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, 4 "I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

5 The Hittites replied to Abraham, 6 "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

7 Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. 8 He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf 9 so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

10 Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. 11 "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."

### Starter Questions:

Does anyone have an older person in your life that you just think is incredible? What is he or she like? Why do you think that way about them?

Has anyone ever made a bucket list? If so, what are some things on your list?

What is your favorite season of the year? Why?

**Opening Prayer:** Lead into this with something casual (i.e., "Okay, let's take a second to pray and invite God's presence.") Then ask God to speak, to help you know him more, and for you to better understand all that he's doing in your lives.

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

### Discussion Questions:

We've been reading and coming to understand more about God through the life of Abraham over the past few weeks. We've seen Abraham make choices time and again that have built his foundation of faith and trust in God.

Isn't that how anything gets built well – step-by-step, small checkmarks, over a period of time? Think of a massive building. Developers can't just one day decide they want a building on a plot of land and *voila*, it's there. No, it needs careful attention, understanding of the end goal, small decisions about the process, and lots of work over a long period of time.

12 Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land 13 and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there."

14 Ephron answered Abraham, 15 "Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."

16 Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

17 So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded 18 to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city.

19 Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

- What's the first thing you notice in these first couple of sentences?

-Sarah's age, Abraham mourning and weeping, the location, etc.

- Why is that particular thing significant to you?

-Sarah is really old! Abraham isn't stoic; he is actually feeling raw emotion. The location must be significant since they mentioned it here.

We actually find a lot of significance in these first sentences. Sarah is very old; Abraham is feeling strong emotions; and the location is significant because Abraham and his family are immigrants to the land.

As someone following God and trying to do it well, or even just to begin to follow God, it is a big relief to see that Abraham isn't just stoically obeying God's commands without emotion or feeling, but that he's really experiencing a truly human moment of loss and mourning. He isn't a robot!

- To most of us, what's going on here isn't exactly clear. What are Abraham and the Hittites talking about? What's happening?

- Abraham was a foreigner in the land, and therefore did not own land (or at least enough land) in order to provide a proper burial site for his wife. In the culture of the time farmland was such a

prized possession it was not supposed to be sold to anyone outside of the family. Abraham has no family in Canaan, and is pleading with the Hittites, the people of the region, to have mercy on him and to sell him some land.

- How, though, do the Hittites initially respond?
  - “Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead.” They like him! They want to give it to him for free!
- Isn’t this mercy and grace? Why do you think Abraham didn’t take them up on this offer?
  - If Abraham was gifted the land for free, in the future, especially once Abraham was also dead, the land could potentially be taken back by the Hittites who gave it to him as if it were a debt they were owed or they could claim it belongs to the family to do with it whatever they wish.

This is a wonderful exchange between Abraham and Ephron. Can’t you see, knowing now what we talked about a minute ago, how Abraham is showing extreme honor and deference to God and to the Hittites? If he doesn’t purchase the land from Ephron outright and simply receives it as a handout, it may be taken from him later. He wants to ensure his land as well as honor Ephron.

But, even still, do you see how much gratitude Abraham has to Ephron and the Hittites?

Twice he bowed down before them, and was committed to giving Ephron what the land was worth.

Now, you might be thinking – *how in the world does this have anything to do with faith in old age?* I wouldn't blame you at all, but we can look deeper into this.

- What is faith? What are we talking about when we talk about *having faith*?

- “Faith is finding God in all things.” –  
Rich Nathan

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see.”  
Hebrews 11:1

- In this story, where is God? How is Abraham “finding God in all things?”
  - Hopefully the group jumps into the discussion here and has some input. Go off of that and build the discussion. If not, some teaching/talking points are below:
  - Abraham is 1) finding God in his own mourning and weeping over the loss of his wife (just as God mourns and weeps over loss), 2) in the mercy of the Hittites, and 3) in himself in his decision to honor them with the full amount they are due. No shortcuts, no handouts, but the full

thing. He does not know what will come of the land after he is gone, but he has faith that a righteous choice now will have long-lasting blessing to his family after him.

Abraham has come close to the end of his life, and has just lost his wife whom he deeply loved and experienced so much with. He weeps and mourns deeply for his wife, but he also begins to graciously prepare a proper burial for her.

- Is Abraham bitter or angry?

-Abraham does not grow angry or bitter in his old age.

Abraham does not play the hopeless victim, nor does he become angry toward God or anyone else. He doesn't show one ounce of either of those responses. How? He has built his faith in God and knows God's good nature.

- Is Abraham selfish and self-focused?

- Abraham is still being righteous in his communion with God and people.

Another thing we can see from Abraham is his consistent honoring of his foreign neighbors, the Hittites. He has trusted and followed God every step of the way, even into this sadness. God has shown him love and mercy in the lands of many strangers over the years, and Abraham is quietly asking God to do it for him once again. He doesn't want the easy way out, although that



would be understandable at this point in his life.  
No, he wants the righteous way.

- Does money concern Abraham?
  - Abraham was not concerned or worried about money. He wanted to use it well.

How many people do we know in old age who have become stingy, hoarders, frugal to the point of obsessive, or simply riddled with anxiety about money? Abraham is the antithesis of this. Without the bat of an eye he refuses to give anything but the full amount for the land.

- Looking at this entire passage, what do you think is going through Abraham's mind? What do you think is at the forefront of his heart?
  - Obviously some grief and mourning, but he trusted God with everything, and was intent on honoring his wife and his neighbors, being gracious and open to grace, and filled with righteousness (right-living).

Read Hebrews 11:10: "For he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Abraham knew God, and was looking into the future, toward eternal life with his Father, where he was certain all his treasures were truly kept and nothing could be taken away from him. No amount of money meant anything to him. Sure, he

wanted to ensure his family was taken care of after he would be gone (hence a reason for the full payment), but he was not concerned with saving anything for himself.

Abraham's whole life was filled with God's grace and provision. Grace came to Abraham, and that fueled his ability to find God in all things, to have faith.

Even in his old age, Abraham knew that in God he had everything he ever needed.

### **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:

Take a few moments to “wait on God” in silence together. Teacher, give the caveat – In the Vineyard we believe that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and therefore we believe he still speaks to us today. He desires to meet with us personally. In this brief couple of minutes, relax, close your eyes, and just be. We will invite God to speak to us – it could be in words, pictures music, anything – and we'll have an opportunity to share afterwards if we feel comfortable.

Ask the beginning question – “What are you looking toward for your needs? Is there a place in your life – anger or bitterness, anxiety about

money, a focus on yourself – that you'd like to open up to God?" Then practice waiting.

At the end, depending on your understanding of your group, either break down into smaller groups of two or three to pray together about the things above, or pray a closing prayer over your group.

Option 2:

Two options to this one – the second requires writing utensils and paper.

1. If your group is multi-generational, have the older people mix with the younger in smaller groups, and ask the older to pray for the younger.
2. If you do not have different generations in your group, take a couple of minutes to think about and write out answers to this question – *“What do you want your life to look like in older age? What kind of person do you want to be?”*

After a couple of minutes, ask some members to share.

Pray together as a group for God to hear and respond to your hopes and prayers for your lives.



# 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!

*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.

### **Week 7:**

#### 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've lacked faith in God, like Sarah, and an area where they need to question God in faith, like Abraham. 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've lacked faith in God, like Sarah, and an area where they need to question God in faith, like Abraham. 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 pray to God and wait on his Spirit regarding the items written on the cards.

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 what they've written on their cards, or what God has spoken to them during this ministry time. 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, and have everyone pray specifically about the items on each other's lists.

## **Week 8:**

### **Option 1:**

Consider an area in your life where you continue to make the same mistakes or are faced with the same temptations over and over again. For this week's ministry time, take a few moments to think about why these might keep happening (could it be due to a lack of wisdom, faith, discipline, etc.?). Then, set a timer for 3-5 minutes and spend some time praying individually, asking God to reveal the source of the mistakes and temptations, and to ask for his help in overcoming them through an increased amount of faith.

### **Option 2:**

Like Abraham, we have a tendency to look out for ourselves when facing temptation, rather than considering those around us. As a result we can end up hurting others, or risk being hurt ourselves by someone who hasn't considered how it would effect us. Is there someone that you have wronged, or who has wronged you, due to giving into the temptation to look out for yourself rather than have faith that God will come through? Take some time to think about a specific situation before breaking into pairs or groups of three and praying about how you can ask for forgiveness or forgive the person who wronged you.

## Week 9:

### Option 1:

Have the participants use their journal or a sheet of paper. Ask them to dig into their Bible and record the verses that show parallels between our Lord Jesus and Isaac.

- Both were the promised sons.
- Both were born after a period of delay.
- Both mothers were assured by God's omnipotence. (Gen. 18:13-14; Luke 1:34, 37)
- Both were given names rich with meaning before they were born.
- Both births occurred at God's appointed time. (Gen. 21:2; Gal. 4:4)
- Both births were miraculous.
- Both births were accompanied by joy. (Gen. 21:6; Luke 1:46-47; 2:10-11)

### Option 2:

Leader: Read Psalm 19:1-4 twice. Ask your group to close their eyes, listen and visualize. Lead your group in a discussion of humility before God in all things put in evangelism in particular.

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
3 They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,*

*their words to the ends of the world.*

### **Week 10:**

#### **Option 1:**

Ask everyone to sit quietly for a few minutes and think of something in their life that is getting in the way of them following Jesus fully. Split up into groups or pairs to pray for one another about having obedience in these areas.

#### **Option 2:**

Alternatively, reflect silently for a few moments on the sacrifice of Jesus. After this, open up a time of praying aloud and go around the group giving thanks to Jesus for giving his life for us. If anyone at your group has not accepted Christ, give an opportunity for them to do so at this time.

### **Week 11:**

#### **Option 1:**

Take a few moments to “wait on God” in silence together. Teacher, give the caveat – In the Vineyard we believe that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and therefore we believe he still speaks to us today. He desires to meet with us personally. In this brief couple of minutes, relax, close your eyes, and just be. We will invite God to speak to us – it could be in words, pictures music, anything – and we’ll have an opportunity to share afterwards if we feel comfortable.



Ask the beginning question – “What are you looking toward for your needs? Is there a place in your life – anger or bitterness, anxiety about money, a focus on yourself – that you’d like to open up to God? Then practice waiting.

At the end, depending on your understanding of your group, either break down into smaller groups of two or three to pray together about the things above, or pray a closing prayer over your group.

#### Option 2:

Two options to this one – the second requires writing utensils and paper.

1. If your group is multi-generational, have the older people mix with the younger in smaller groups, and ask the older to pray for the younger.
2. If you do not have different generations in your group, take a couple of minutes to think about and write out answers to this question – “*What do you want your life to look like in older age? What kind of person do you want to be?*”

After a couple of minutes, ask some members to share.

Pray together as a group for God to hear and respond to your hopes and prayers for your lives.