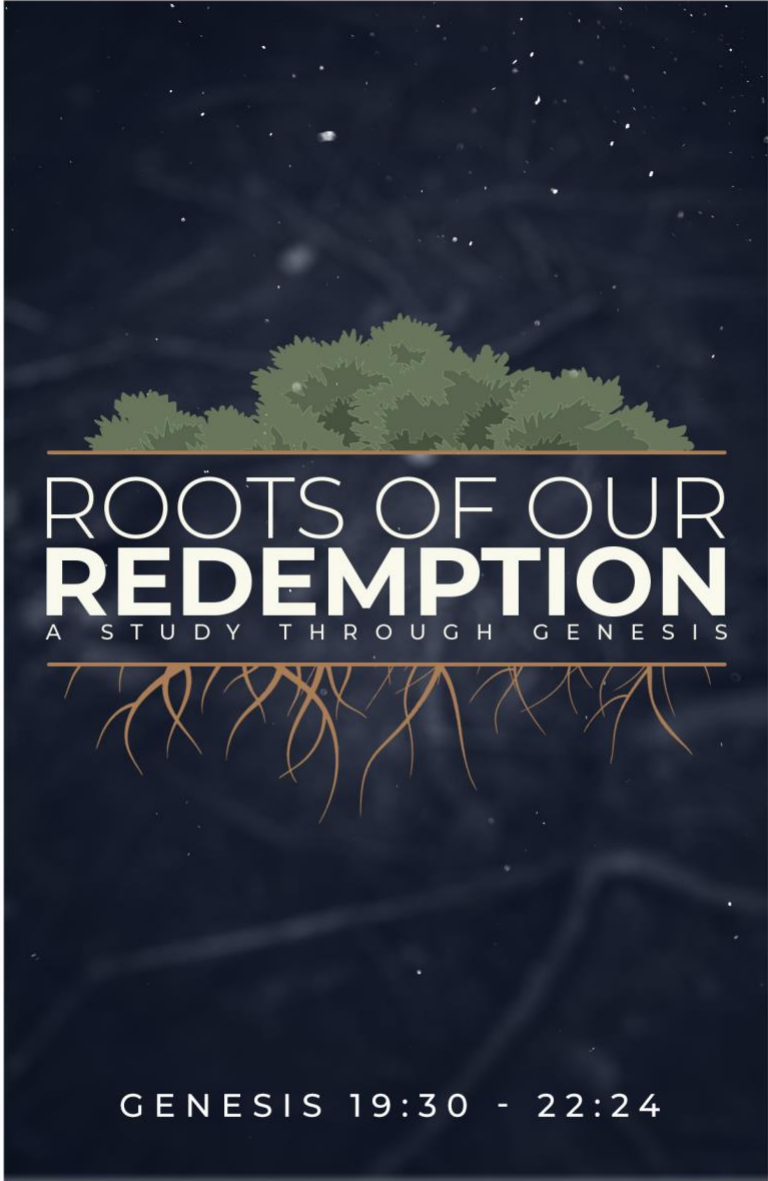
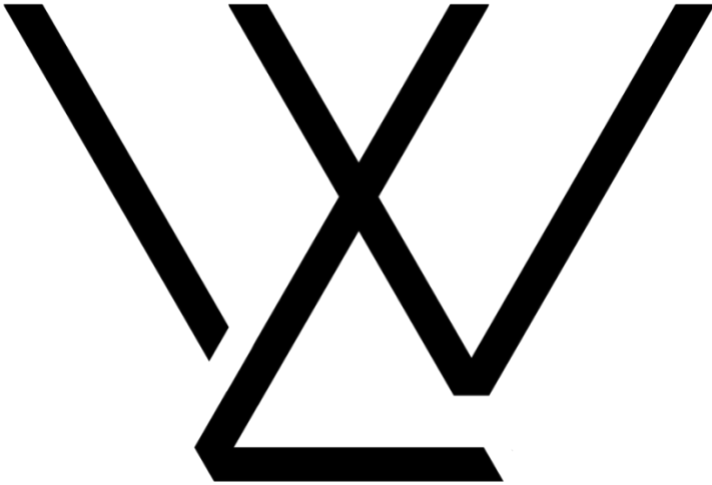




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 14 - 17





Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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Week 14: Genesis 19:30-38

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Genesis 19:30-38

DISCLAIMER: *this week's biblical text has some mature themes and may not be suitable for families who are reading the Word to Life studies with children. I have worked with our team to handle these topics carefully, but parents are encouraged to use discretion. -Pastor Stephen*

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** What did Lot choose to do after he arrived in the land of Zoar?

- **Question:** After reading vv. 30-38 what do you think is the lasting legacy of Lot and his family?

- **Question:** What do you think led Lot's daughters to their plan with their father?

- **Activity:** The biblical text reminds us that the children of Lot's daughters became the Moabites and Ammonites. Briefly research some other references to both the Moabites and the Ammonites in Scripture. What do you notice as you do?

Week 14: Genesis 19:30-38

Day 2: The Sin of Compromise

READ: Genesis 19:30-38

EXPLORE:

I (Lucas) recently read something a mother said to her son as she drove him to college for the first time. "...you are light. It's a fact. It's your God-given nature as one of His kids. And you are headed into the pitch-black darkness. There will be times when you act like the darkness, but you will never be the darkness, and you will never be at home in the darkness again."¹ I wish these words had been cemented in my mind as I entered adulthood.

This week's passage reminds me of the damage that results when light tries to mingle with darkness. As we've gone through the account of Abraham and Lot, perhaps you've asked some of the following questions: Why would Lot move so close to a wicked city?² Why would he return after being taken as a prisoner of war?³ Why would he marry someone from this place? Why would he allow his daughters to be engaged to wicked men?⁴

Today's focus is on the tendency we have to try to get as close to the line of sin without going over. How much of the truth can we bend before it becomes a lie? How long can we look at someone before it becomes lust? How much sinful content will we consume in a show or movie before we turn it off? Too often we think that there is a gray area between right and wrong that we can exist in. This is a lie of the enemy. It makes "wrong" seem like an innocuous concept whose boundary we can get close to so long as we don't touch it. But do you remember what God said to Cain before he killed his brother Abel? "...*sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you...*"⁵ Study out the context of this

¹ *Get Out of Your Head* by Jeannie Allen, 203.

² See Genesis 13:12-13 for reference.

³ See Genesis 14:12 for reference.

⁴ See Genesis 19:4 for reference.

⁵ See Genesis 4:7 for reference.

verse and you will see that God is calling Cain to move towards what is right and away from what is wrong. We should think about this like riding a skateboard uphill. If we are not pushing forward, empowered the power of the Holy Spirit, sin will pull us down. There is no time to stand still, no room for passivity or compromise.

It has never been about a line to cross. It has always been about a Savior who became sin for us so that we could be freed from it.⁶ The only logical response to such a gift is overwhelming gratitude and full allegiance to Him. I spent much of my teens and twenties as light trying to be comfortable in the darkness of compromise. My life of compromise left a lot of hurt and hypocrisy in its wake. For better or worse, our actions always affect others. We see this in the life of Lot. The sin of Lot's daughters, as shocking as it may be, was a sin of compromise. Instead of trusting God's provision, they took matters into their own hands. And it was Lot's life of compromise that paved the way for his daughters to do the same.

Brothers and sisters, be careful! Many have stood on the edge of sin only to fall deep into its valley. Don't believe the lie that you can compromise and be okay. As 1 Peter 3:11 tells us, *"...turn away from evil and do good..."*.

BIG IDEA: Lot's life of compromise paved the way for his daughters' sin of compromise.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In which areas of life do you struggle with compromise? What are the lines of disobedience that you try to get close to?

- **Activity:** Read 2 Peter 2:6-8. How does this change the way you might have viewed Lot? In what way does this remind you of how true righteousness is attained?

⁶ See 2 Corinthians 5:21 for reference.

Week 14: Genesis 19:30-38

Day 3: The Final Scene in a Tragic Story

READ: Genesis

EXPLORE:

The epilogue of Lot's story which occurs in a cave near Zoar is an unsurprising end to a tragic story. Only a few chapters before, Lot's situation did not appear too different from Abraham's. Lot, like his uncle, had amassed a great wealth. Genesis 13:5-7 states, *"And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock."* The uncomfortable passage we have been reading this week is yet another potent reminder of how deeply sin distorts and how profoundly sin destroys.

Although Abraham's legacy was marred by sin, his life was marked by faith and a commitment to the righteousness and justice of the Lord.⁷ Lot's legacy was quite the opposite. Genesis makes that clear. His wife met a swift demise. His sons-in-law did not respect him. His children had little to learn from him. At the beginning of the chapter Lot did not protect his daughters as he was willing to have them harmed and dehumanized. Now, at the close of his story, the sinful desperation and deplorable situation for the cave dwelling trio leaves a lasting legacy.

I (Stephen) think it's important to note that marriages would have been normally arranged in the Ancient Near East. It could have been that their family had no connections or that Lot was negligent in some earlier responsibilities. Regardless, the desperation of Lot's daughters to have a spouse and children would have raised eyes for the historical audience and for us today. It is clear that the daughters did not evaluate their actions based upon God's design but based upon societies standards. In their reasoning together the firstborn said to the younger, *"Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after*

⁷ See Genesis 18:18-19 for reference.

the manner of all the earth." In their despair, they had either forgotten or were ignorant to the fact that it is the Lord who opens the womb and enables children to be created.⁸ They went after a thing that God had blessed (children) in a way that God had not blessed (drunken incest and violation).

The daughters clearly knew that Lot would not agree to their sinful plan. Lot's daughters acted out the same patterns of immorality from Sodom with their father.⁹ They didn't just succeed once; their inebriated father was tricked on consecutive nights. Lot is far from innocent in the story. He is presented as one who is blameworthy despite his drunken ignorance. His daughters were overcome by restlessness, fear, and desperation as they sought to preserve offspring contrary to God's design.¹⁰ This concluding scene serves as a reminder not only of the brokenness resulting from sin, but also as a sober reminder to daily trust the Lord and pursue righteousness.

BIG IDEA: All three individuals in the story acted in sin and this fact ought to challenge us to daily trust the Lord and pursue righteousness.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Abraham is not sinless, but his example is often contrasted with Lot's. In the space below, compare and contrast the two. (*Hint:* It is easier to start with Lot's actions as they are contrasted with Abraham's.)

- **Question:** In what way does Genesis 19:30-38 challenge you in your faith or warn you in your life?

⁸ This concept is repeated throughout Scripture, but it has been visible with Sarah in Genesis 16:2 already.

⁹ The phrase "Come let us make" and "we will lie with him" can be drawn into comparison with the comments of the sexually violent crowd in Genesis 19:5.

¹⁰ The Hebrew is not explicitly clear whether they wanted to have offspring for their own provision or for the preservation of Lot's legacy and social immortality. Regardless, the biblical text makes it clear that all three acted in sin.

Week 14: Genesis 19:30-38

Day 4: The Moabites and Ammonites

READ: Genesis 19:30-38 and Deuteronomy 23:3-6

EXPLORE:

As the story of Lot comes to a close at the end of our passage this week, we're given insight into the origins of the Moabite and Ammonite peoples. While Lot is only briefly mentioned in passing twice throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the shameful legacy of his daughters' actions in Genesis 19 lives on through the Israelites' regular interactions with their distant Moabite and Ammonite cousins, and specifically, the conflict, bitter animosity, temptation, and sin that marks these exchanges throughout scripture.

As the Israelites approach the promised land in Numbers 22, it's the king of Moab who seeks to curse them. Moabite women then serve to ensnare the Israelites in sexual immorality and the worship of false gods.¹¹ And this pattern repeats itself throughout the book of Judges, with God's people seduced into worshiping Moabite and Ammonite false gods, foolishly turning their back on the Lord, and then facing the consequence of oppression at the hands of the Moabites and Ammonites.¹² Animosity and warfare continue into the days of King Saul and King David with harsh fighting between Israel and these neighboring kingdoms commonplace.¹³ And it's King Solomon's willingness to build altars to false Moabite and Ammonite gods that ultimately tears the kingdom of Israel apart.¹⁴

Sin carries consequences. And the sin we see played out at the end of Genesis 19 has a lasting impact on God's people. Just think how much strife could have been saved if Lot's daughters hadn't shamefully pursued their own desires apart from God's design for marriage and family. The Moabites and Ammonites are bad news. So much so that

¹¹ See Numbers 25:1-3 for reference.

¹² See Judges 3:12-14 and Judges 10:6-9 for example.

¹³ See 1 Samuel 11:1-2 for example.

¹⁴ See 1 Kings 11:7-13 for reference.

God warns His people that “*no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD*”.¹⁵ They can’t be part of the community. With origins steeped in sin and a track record of bad behavior and sinful influence, they are on the outside looking in, and need to remain so.

But in our broken world, God can use even our failures to bring about good. He can work in spite of a sinful decision, or through a sinful people. And we need look no further than Ruth, Ruth the Moabite, the outsider who becomes the great-grandmother of King David¹⁶ and holds a prominent place in the genealogy of our savior Jesus¹⁷, Jesus the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of God — and the son of a Moabite. And it’s in Ruth’s redemption and the story of Lot’s daughters that we’re reminded that we all come from sinful origins. Our brokenness is real, original sin is real, our depravity is real — but God’s grace is bigger. He can and He does redeem.

BIG IDEA: Sin carries consequences, but God uses even our brokenness to accomplish His will and His plan for redemption.

APPLY:

- **Questions:** Can you think of other examples in Scripture where God’s plan unfolds in spite of, or in the midst of, human sin? Can you think of examples from your own life where God has graciously worked in spite of your own brokenness or the failure of others?
- **Activity:** Are there people in your life who you view as far outside the fold of God? Spend time praying for them, that God would work in their hearts and use their life for His glory.

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 23:3 for reference.

¹⁶ See Ruth 4:13-17 for reference.

¹⁷ See Matthew 1:5 for reference.

Week 14: Genesis 19:30-38

Day 5: The Mighty have Fallen

READ TOGETHER: Numbers 20:10-13, Luke 22:54-62

Instructions: We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The 1998 M.L.B. season was one of the most exciting and memorable in baseball's history. Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were both chasing the single season homerun record previously held by Roger Maris. Every at bat from both players was must-watch television and SportsCenter was running stories every day. Both players would go on to break the record in the 98 season and they gave baseball a story to run with for years. As great as their run was, both players had an equally great fall. Steroid use tarnished their records and put in doubt for many the integrity of the game. Baseball's 98 season reminds me of Lot's story.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen! Lot also had a historic rise to fame. He was the nephew of the great patriarch Abraham. God told Abraham he would make his name great and by extension Lot's name also become great. Lot became wealthy due to God's blessings upon Abraham. It was after all this success that Lot's fall began to precipitate. Lot took his eyes off the Lord and set them upon Sodom. We read how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire due to their wickedness.

After God destroyed Sodom, Lot thought he had nowhere else to go. It is telling that Lot chose not to go back under Abraham's covering as he had once lived. Whatever his reasons, he chose to live in a cave with his two surviving daughters. Oh, how the mighty have fallen! All of Lot's possessions were destroyed in the fire and now he lives homeless without much future hope.

It is in the cave where his daughters devise a wicked plan to impregnate themselves with their father's children. His daughters believed they had no other option. Even though Lot was drunk he was still guilty of sin. His daughter's sins were greater, but Lot should have never been drunk and participated in this evil act. Lot seemed to do a good job resisting evil in Sodom, but he was not on guard to resist the temptations of his own daughters. What was good start for Lot in the Biblical record, had a very poor ending.

BIG IDEA: Lot's Fall was faster than his rise to fame.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Write down some other Biblical examples of the "mighty falling" and what you can learn from them.
- **Question:** Why do you think it is harder to resist the temptation of a family member than it is a stranger?

- **Activity:** Map the conversation between God and Abimelech in the space below. As you do so, write down some observations about their dialogue.
 - God said to Abimelech (v. 3):
 - Your Observations:

 - Abimelech responded to God (vv. 4-5):
 - Your Observations:

 - God responded to Abimelech's response (vv. 6-7):
 - Your Observations:

- **Question:** After reading the story to completion, what is the lasting impression that you have of Abimelech? What is the impression you have also of Abraham?

Week 15: Genesis 20:1-18

Day 2: The Theological Depth of a Message from God

READ: Genesis 20:1-18

EXPLORE:

When we survey the recurrent patterns of sin in the Bible, we should not be surprised to find Abraham repeating the same mistake with Sarah in Gerar that he made earlier in Egypt. People make the same mistakes! Instead of trusting the Lord and His promises, Abraham failed to protect his bride. Abimelech ignorantly took Sarah into his house and God made sure to pay him a visit.

In a dream, God spoke to Abimelech, saying, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." Now Abimelech had not approached her. So, he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."¹⁸

The verses above are filled with subjects which are worthy of exploration. I (Stephen) am certain that we won't be able to do justice to the theological density. Instead of trying to comprehensively study each aspect, my aim in today's study is to briefly introduce a few different points of consideration that might benefit you as you continue to meditate on God's words to King Abimelech.

First, this passage reminds us that God's omniscience necessarily means that He knows every action and every intention. God knew what the king had knowingly done. God knew what the king had unknowingly

¹⁸ See Genesis 20:3-7 for reference.

done. Moreover, God knew the intentions of the king's heart. God knows all things and we would benefit greatly from being reminded of that truth.

Second, this passage reminds us that ignorance of wrongdoing cannot be disconnected from the consequences for that wrongdoing. Even though Abimelech was unaware of the weightiness of his wrongful action, God did not detach a sense of culpability for his actions because of his ignorance. In response to God telling him that he was a dead man, Abimelech was able to return Sarah and not ultimately be destroyed. God's judgment is certainly severe, but it is always just.

Third, this passage introduces the conversation about how the sovereignty of God interacts with human decision-making. God kept the king from sinning. Even though Abimelech was on the verge of judgment because he somewhat unknowingly came against the promise-laden, covenant-carrying couple, God was gracious and provided a way out. Sarah had a special place in God's redemptive purposes and the sin committed in this text was not only against Sarah, but also against God Himself. God graciously kept Abimelech from sinning, but, at the same time, He also commanded him to return Sarah in order to avoid judgment. We may not be able to understand precisely how God's power relates with significantly free moral creatures, but we ought not delete mystery where it remains.

BIG IDEA: God's message to Abimelech introduces us to valuable conversations surrounding God's omniscience and His power as it interacts with the weightiness of human decision-making.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** This WTL aimed to introduce valuable areas for discussion and meditation from Genesis 20:1-18. Pick one or more of the following areas from today's study and write more about them below. Work to incorporate Scripture as you do so. Conclude your time of study and writing with prayer.
 - (1) The significance of God's omniscience (2) The gravity of wrong decisions made in ignorance (3) The relationship between God's sovereignty and human action.

Week 15: Genesis 20:1-18

Day 3: Distrusting God's faithfulness

READ: Genesis 20:1-18

EXPLORE:

"Again? Wait, am I in the right chapter? Have I already read this? ..." Certainly, these are some of the first thoughts for many of us when we come to Genesis 20. On the path to the realization of a great promise, this seems like an unnecessary detour down a dark alley. But it becomes another great example of God's incredible faithfulness and mercy despite our sinful nature.

After Abraham and Sarah repeat the same sin with the same result as in Egypt years earlier, through providential protection using a dream and a curse, God ensures the purity of Sarah with Abimelech by letting him know of the harsh results that would befall he and his household if he were to take Sarah. Additionally, we find out in the dream that God actually kept Abimelech from being with Sarah that night and sinning against God. Despite Abraham and Sarah's repeated sin and lack of faith, God takes direct action to preserve the purity of Sarah and keep His promise to Abraham intact.

God's mercy also shows when He describes Abraham as a prophet, even in the midst of his sin, and ultimately has Abraham pray for Abimelech to save his life. Although God did not directly rebuke Abraham for his actions, we do see in verses 9 and 10 that Abimelech rebuked Abraham and Abraham did confess to his deception.

Interestingly, although not a Godly king, Abimelech seems to have sensed his plan to take Sarah into his harem was wrong, so he made amends by giving Abraham and Sarah livestock, slaves, a thousand shekels of silver and permission to live on his land.

This passage is a reminder that God's grace and mercy was still extended to Abraham and Sarah. Despite Abraham's lack of faith, they were able to walk out of a messy situation blessed and with their promised destiny still intact.

BIG IDEA: God is always faithful, even when, or especially when we are not.

APPLY:

- **Question:** While it is easy to criticize Abraham and Sarah for repeating a sin that had already gotten them in trouble once, how often do we find ourselves repeating the same sins and having to learn the same lesson over again?
- **Question:** Have you experienced freedom from a previously held repetitive sin. If so, how did that freedom occur?
- **Question:** According to Scripture, how would you describe the seriousness of purity in marriage? What can we do today to reflect its importance in our lives?

Week 15: Genesis 20:1-18

Day 4: Praying for People

READ: Genesis 20:1-18 (Focus specifically on vv. 7 and 17)

EXPLORE:

Chapter 20 ends with an interesting couple of verses. We find out that the Lord closed the wombs of all the females in Gerar and afflicted Abimelech, and those around him, with some kind of terminal malady. Interestingly, God made His actions known by appearing to Abimelech in a dream and giving him instructions, which included returning Sarah to her husband and asking Abraham to pray for him. The last part seems almost out of place, and yet, prayer has always been a foundational component throughout the scriptures.

Prayer is our means of communicating with God. Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. This was so important to God, that from the first days He called the Israelite people apart from the culture around them, He set up systems to make known what was important for spiritual growth. The Old Testament tabernacle, and subsequent temples, held the altar of incense which was to be tended to every morning and evening by the high priest. A fragrant blend of spices was placed on it and only the coals from the altar of sacrifice were used to fuel it. The incense represented the prayers of the people (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3), and it was to stay perpetually burning (Ex 30:34-38). This established practice showed the importance of prayer and more specifically intercession, as not everyone was able to approach the Holy God. Our passage today described Abraham as the prophet/priest that had the rare privilege of going to God on behalf of other people who wouldn't or couldn't do it themselves.

Intercessory prayer is extremely impactful. By praying, Abraham saved the life of the king, restored his family, and secured the

existence of future generations. That's powerful! God created us for relationship, and we need others, especially when we are weak, hurt, or lost. A beautiful example of this is depicted when Aaron and Hur helped Moses to lift up his hands.¹⁹ Sometimes praying seems tedious, repetitive, rote, or even impotent. Sometimes we do not know what to say or have said it a thousand times already. However, when we invite others to pray for us and vice versa, not only is the battle shortened, but joy in the victory is shared.

God required coals from the altar of sacrifice to be used on the altar of incense because a sweet and acceptable fragrance before the Lord required the blood of a sacrifice. When you lift up your prayers to God, you can be sure that He is pleased because the blood of His son was shed. Jesus is the source of fire for our prayers and the only access to the throne of grace. He is the ultimate and only intercessor between God the Father and mankind.²⁰

BIG IDEA: Our victories are sweetest when shared.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How is your prayer life? Do you pray for others? Do you allow others to pray for you?

- **Read and Reflect:** Ezekiel 22:30; James 5:16; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; Philippians 4:6

¹⁹ See Exodus 17:12 for reference.

²⁰ See Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 for reference.

Week 15: Genesis 20:1-18

Day 5: It's not your Fault

READ TOGETHER: Judges 16:1-22

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

“It’s not your fault” is one of the most iconic lines in cinematic history. Sean (Robin Williams) says these words repeatedly to Will (Matt Damon) in order to assure him that the abuse he suffered as a kid wasn’t his fault. These words were true and helpful for some healing in Will’s life. We are tempted to say the same line to Abimelech when we read this story. Abimelech has taken another man’s wife, but he is none the wiser for it. Abraham tricked him by saying that Sarah was his sister. This was partially true as Sarah was his half-sister, but Abraham left out the most important relationship (spouse) he had with Sarah.

The Lord graciously comes to Abimelech in a dream by night. God tells Abimelech that he is a dead man because he has taken another man’s wife. This can seem quite dramatic to us since Abimelech was deceived. We might even sympathize and say it wasn’t his fault. However, we must remember the promise that God made with Abraham when He said that He would curse those that curse him. For Abimelech to ignorantly take Sarah into his household was to curse Abraham. God must keep His word and curse Abimelech.

We are all fallen sinners and we like to shift the blame even when we know we are in the wrong. We also like to make excuses for our sin and make the claim that it wasn't our fault. But, our God is holy and we sin not only when we knowingly break God's law but also when we unknowingly break God's law. Should someone deceive us into a sin, or we fail to tell the truth when we attempt to, we have still sinned. This can be a hard pill to swallow, but consider Abimelech's situation. Had Abimelech carried out his desires he would have committed adultery with another man's wife. It didn't matter that he didn't know he was going to commit adultery. God graciously warned Abimelech from committing this great sin. May God graciously open our eyes when we do not know we are in the wrong!

BIG IDEA: Abimelech was in sin even though he was not aware of it.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think God allows Abraham to keep repeating this same error?

- **Activity:** Name a time God graciously opened up your eyes to keep you from sinning.

- **Question:** What do you notice about how God is recorded as having dealt with Hagar and Ishmael?

- **Question:** Where else do you read about Beersheba in the Scriptures? (*Hint:* You may need to use an online study tool.) Why might that location be significant?

- **Activity:** Summarize the second scene recorded in vv. 22-34 in your own words.

Week 16: Genesis 21:1-34

Day 2: Expansive Joy

READ: Genesis 21:1-34

EXPLORE:

Abraham and Sarah's story is marked by the unwavering faithfulness of God to the often-fickle couple. In many ways, the birth of Isaac is the moment for which we too have been waiting. We know that character is not just developed but is also exposed in the crucible moments of life. Surely a great deal is revealed in victory and defeat, but what do we learn when a long-awaited promise comes to fruition? This is the exact scenario which unfolds in the foretold birth of Isaac.

From his conception to confirmation and from his naming to the joyous celebration, Genesis 21:1-7 is incredibly significant. We need to understand and rightly appreciate the birth of Isaac, but we should not be so swept up in it that we miss some of the incredible details in Sarah's response. In fact, a quick study of her reaction will help us to appreciate the fulfillment of God's promise even more! Sarah said, "*God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.*"²¹ This is a wonderful transformation from what occurred in Sarah's story many years before. We need to remember that the same Sarah who is now filled with joyous laughter once scoffed at the promises of God.²² It is no small thing that God exchanged her disbelief for the blissful gratitude toward Him that she exhibits in this passage.

As a typical rhythm, LifePoint teaches using the English Standard Version translation of Scripture.²³ For Genesis 21:6, however, I (Stephen) believe that other translations make better sense of Sarah's comments. Instead of translating Sarah's Hebrew expression as "*laugh*

²¹ See Genesis 21:6 for reference.

²² See Genesis 18:12 for reference.

²³ We believe it is a beneficial translation that makes sense of the biblical context in contemporary language.

over me,” it makes better sense to understand it as *“laugh with me.”*²⁴ Sarah is indicating how others are going to share in her joy – they are not laughing *at* her; God has made it possible for others to rejoice and laugh *with* her. I’d encourage you to think deeply about this. The miraculous birth of Isaac is not the last nor the greatest birth of a son which will extend the joy of the mother to many others. The supernatural, covenant-keeping birth of Isaac sets a pattern that we see over and over again throughout Scripture that points us to the virgin birth of Jesus.

The joy experienced in the birth of Isaac is wide-ranging in more ways than one. Sarah asked a powerful rhetorical question: *Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?*²⁵ Notice that she did not say child, but children. The intentional inclusion of the plural (children) is a subtle, but purposeful reminder that God’s blessing was multi-generational, far-reaching, and greater than the skepticism that often marked their story. God was faithful during their past, in their present, and with their future. Praise God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow for us as well in Christ!

BIG IDEA: The subtle details of Isaac’s birth help us to develop a deeper appreciation of how the fulfillment of God’s promises result in expansive joy.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Today we focused on vv. 1-7. If you read Sarah’s actions in the context of the chapter as a whole, what do you notice?

- **Question:** Do you live as though the promises of God result in expansive and contagious joy? If not, why not? If yes, how so?

²⁴ The Christian Standard, New American Standard, Holman Christian Standard, and the New International translations of Scripture, as well as many others, translate Genesis 21:6 as “with me.”

²⁵ See Genesis 21:7 for reference.

Week 16: Genesis 21:1-34

Day 3: A Promise is a Promise

READ: Genesis 21:8-21

EXPLORE:

The story of Hagar and Ishmael can be hard to accept. We are tempted to see it through a lens of discomfort, cringing at the thought of the patriarch and matriarch of our faith casting a slave woman and her young boy (suggested to be 13-14 years old) into the desert with only one skin of water. Let's step back and get an aerial view to find the beauty in this broken story. As is abundantly clear by now, God made a promise to Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars if he could count them, that all people would be blessed through him.²⁶ But, when they became impatient in the waiting, Abraham and Hagar had Ishmael. Was this an act of sinful disobedience on the part of Sarah and Abraham? It was. Was it irredeemable, the promise shattered, because they brought their sin into the story? It was not.

When we studied Genesis 16, we learned that when Hagar was pregnant, she fled to the desert because she was mistreated by Sarah. An angel spoke to her and told her God's promise that her son would become an innumerable nation but he would be a *"donkey of a man."* Strife and trouble would follow him.²⁷ Isaac was also promised to become a numerous nation. His descendants would enter the promised land one day and the Great Seed would come from him. The promises were different but were from the same God. Let's not miss the result of God's promise to Ishmael. From Ishmael came twelve rulers who settled near the border of Egypt and became the clan called the

²⁶ See Genesis 12:2-3 and 15:5 for reference.

²⁷ See Genesis 16:6-12 for reference.

Ishmaelites.²⁸ The Arab nations are the descendants of the Ishmaelites and are the fulfilment of God's promise to Hagar. Interestingly enough, a band of brothers, Isaac's grandsons, later sold their brother, Joseph, to a group of Ishmaelites who then traded him to the Egyptians.²⁹ The promises to Isaac and Ishmael were very different, and it may be displeasing to weigh the two, but we will see how God was still right, good, and worthy of praise in both the text and our lives today.

Sarah and Abraham sinned and tried to take control of the situation to bring God's promise to fruition in their own way, yet they still received the greater blessing. It appears a little unfair that Hagar reaped hardship and a more trivial blessing, consequences of something she had no choice in. But Scripture makes it clear that God does not bless decisions born of sin. Don't miss the weight of what Sarah says in Genesis 16:5, "*May the Lord judge between you and me.*" It is no fun to prepare yourself for the Lord to judge your wrongdoing. Let's get coffee and I (Sarah) can tell you all about that feeling.

Back to the text, once again, Hagar found herself in the desert. In grief, she prepared for the death of her child, running out of food and water in the once full skin she was given. And, once again, God saw her in this moment. He did not look on her situation with sorrow or regret for her circumstance, but *reminded* her of the promise. Then He had mercy, interestingly enough, by providing a well, like one seen the first time she had fled. When water/wells are mentioned in the Bible it symbolizes supply and life, and later an analogy of Himself as Living Water (John 4:10-11, 7:38). In contrast, deserts mean trials, wandering, lacking. God had love and compassion on her and her son, born from sin. But He

²⁸ See Genesis 25:12-18 for reference.

²⁹ See Genesis 37:18-28 for reference.

showed *all* of them, a trio of messy sinners, that with Him, a promise is a promise.

Praise God that we are under a covenant of grace now! As sinful as you are and will be, if you have declared that God is the God of your life, you cannot lose out on God's promise that through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross you were declared covered by His blood and grace, which was credited to your eternal account. He is the propitiation for our sin. This waterfall of grace should not offer us an excuse to sin or justify a search for living water in empty wells, or ever make us think that our sin goes without consequence. What we do get is the blessed assurance that God is a Promise-Keeper, Kinsman-Redeemer; He sees us, fills us, and in all things, He is good.

BIG IDEA: God keeps His promises. While our disobedience comes with consequences, we are still sealed with God our savior.

Apply:

- **Question:** God opens eyes to the well of your life. Are there cracks that need repair? What caused those cracks? Ask God today to begin restoration.
- **Challenge:** Identify your heaviest idols and locate Scripture that warns of the danger of allowing these to settle in your life, then read Isaiah 58:11

Week 16: Genesis 21:1-34

Day 4: Abimelech's Covenant with Abraham

READ: Genesis 21:22-34

EXPLORE:

I (Jonathan) am a difficult customer. I don't just walk into a store, open up my wallet, and start spending. I comparison-shop, I ask too many questions, and I analyze everything to death. Although I dislike shopping, my most enjoyable big-purchase experience was when I bought a new fridge and clothes-dryer. The salesman, an Israeli, was extremely helpful and patient with me and all my questions. When I finally made a decision, he assured me "as a Jew to a Christian" (his words!) that I was getting a great deal. He perceived that I was a Christian, and he dealt with me on that basis.

In a similar way, Abimelech dealt with Abraham on the basis of Abraham's relationship with God. He opened the negotiations by acknowledging that God was with Abraham in all he did. Abimelech beseeched Abraham to swear "by God" that he would not deal falsely. Abraham had deceived Abimelech in the past, so to avoid more shenanigans, Abimelech brought God into it. On the basis of Abraham's own past history, he was expected to deal falsely;³⁰ but on the basis of Abraham's relationship with God, honesty was in order.

Abraham's relationship with God was also the key factor in Abimelech's desire to secure a non-aggression treaty. Abimelech was a king with an army, and Abraham was a landless wanderer, but Abimelech recognized that his own army was no match for Abraham's God. He knew that Abraham's line would continue through his miracle-son Isaac, and he hoped to avoid future conflict between their descendants.

Abimelech also appealed to his own kindness toward Abraham. Although the repeat-offender Abraham had employed the same deceptions in his past dealings with both Abimelech and Pharaoh, the

³⁰ See Gen. 12:10-20 and 20:1-17 for reference. The Abimelech's in Gen. 20 and 21 could be the same or father/son.

response of these two kings was different. Pharaoh deported Abraham from Egypt, but Abimelech graciously extended amnesty and legal permanent resident status to Abraham's entire entourage.⁵

Abraham agreed to the treaty with Abimelech but secured a significant concession: the title to a well which would come to mark the southern limit of Israel in future years. This place came to be called Beersheba, since *shebu'ah* is Hebrew for "oath," representing the covenant between these two nations, and *sheba'* is Hebrew for "seven," the number of lambs Abraham set apart for Abimelech. Although these lambs could not speak, they (and their possible future offspring) were a silent "witness" to Abimelech and his people that the well belonged to Abraham's offspring. By planting a tree there, Abraham showed his faith that his offspring would possess the land, as God had promised. He called on the name of the Everlasting God who continues through all generations and always keeps his promises.

BIG IDEA: Abimelech and Abraham made a covenant based on Abraham's relationship with the Everlasting God and Abimelech's kindness to Abraham.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read 2 Corinthians 4:2. As Abraham solemnly agreed to stop dealing falsely with Abimelech, are there "disgraceful, underhanded ways" which you need to renounce in light of Christ's death on your behalf and the new life you have in him?
- **Activity:** Read Psalm 90:1-4 and reflect on what it means that God is Everlasting.

Week 16: Genesis 21:1-34

Day 5: Two Sons

READ TOGETHER: Galatians 4:21-31 and Luke 1:26-38

Instructions: We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Two sons can have two very different stories. We see this in the very first family in the history of the world. Cain and Abel took two very different paths. Maybe in your own family you see two siblings leading very different lives. Isaac and Ishamel also lived extremely diverse lives.

The Lord visited Sarah and she conceived and bore Abraham a son. The text makes it abundantly clear that this birth was no act of man, but an act of God. This was a miraculous birth. Sarah had been barren and was past the age of childbirth. Isaac's birth is a foreshadowing of the miraculous birth of Christ – only God could make this happen.

This is a story of great redemption. Abraham and Sarah endured many difficulties in their long wait for God's promise to be fulfilled. They committed many errors along the way, but God remained faithful to them and to His promise. The child of promise, Isaac, was finally here! (The name *Isaac* means laughter. This speaks of the great joy that Isaac brought to his family and would bring to the world.) A great feast was thrown for him on

the day he was weaned. A weaned child is a lot less vulnerable than a non-weaned child. This was an occasion worthy of celebration.

However, this celebration gave Ishmael an opportunity to mock Isaac. We are not told the specifics, but Sarah overheard it. Her response was to have Abraham throw Ishmael and Hagar out of the family. This may seem like an overreaction, but it was indeed the Lord's will. There was not to be a competition between Isaac and Ishmael in Abraham's household.

Ishmael went on to be raised in the wilderness by his mother with God's protection. God would make of him a great nation, but he was not the child of promise. His life had to separate from Isaac's and take on a very different form. Isaac would be raised in Abraham's household, and he would have to endure the trials of faith like his father before him.

God's plans and purposes are not always immediately apparent to us. Isaac and Ishmael would each give birth to great rival nations; God would use them both to carry out His sovereign purposes.

BIG IDEA: A man plans out his ways, but the Lord directs his steps.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Name other siblings in the Bible who take very different paths.
- **Question:** What problems do you think would have arisen if Ishmael had stayed in Abraham's household?

Week 17: Genesis 22:1-24

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Genesis 22:1-24

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Read Isaac and Abraham's brief conversation in vv. 7-8. What impression are you left with from their terse communication?

- **Question:** God clearly told Abraham to sacrifice his son. Who told Abraham to not lay a hand on the boy in v. 11? Why might that be significant?

- **Question:** When a substitutionary sacrifice was provided for Abraham and Isaac, the hill was called “The Lord will provide.” In what way is this story connected to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary?

- **Activity:** Read Hebrews 11:17-19. How does this passage help you to understand the story which unfolds in Genesis 22?

Week 17: Genesis 22:1-24

Day 2: Abraham Called to Sacrifice His Son

READ: Genesis 22:1-24

EXPLORE:

In today's Word to Life we will discuss Abraham's test of faith on Mount Moriah. In Genesis 12:1 the Lord calls Abram, *"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."* This was a call from God for Abram to separate himself from his past to follow God. In this week's passage the Lord calls Abraham to *"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."* This was a call from God for Abraham to sacrifice the future that God had promised Abraham to follow God. As Abraham answered God's call in Genesis 12, Abraham is again prepared to answer the call in Genesis 22.

Leviticus 18:21 states *"Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."* Additionally, Deuteronomy 12:31 states *"You must not worship the Lord your God I their way, because worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods."* In light of what these passages tell us of God's view on child sacrifice, why does God direct Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

Perhaps the most prudent answer comes from Isaiah 55:8 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways declares the Lord."* However, we can look at the text for answers. The most probable reason from the text is that it was a test of Abraham. The passage opens with the *"Some time later God tested Abraham."* Abraham clearly had faith in God to deliver on

His promises of Genesis 17 to fulfill His covenant through Isaac as he tells his servants *"We will worship and then we will come back to you."* Abraham again affirmed his faith in the Lord when he answers Isaac's questioning that *"God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."* This passage is not certainly prescriptive of what we ought to do with children, but it is descriptive of what would ultimately be accomplished in the death of Christ.

As we see in the passage when the Lord provides the Ram for the offering, it is often the case that the Lord requires faith from us and provides the sacrifice from himself. This is what we see here in Genesis 22 and what is reflected to us in the life of Christ. That we should have faith, and that God has provided the sacrifice to allow us to draw near Him.

BIG IDEA: Abraham was called to be faithful in his relationship to the Lord and God provided for him by delivering on His promises.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Abraham is an example of faith that we can all learn from. What are some examples in your life, where God has delivered something in response to a faithful heart?

- **Question:** How does this passage of God's call for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac compare to the message of John 3:16? What does this tell us about God's character?

Week 17: Genesis 22:1-24

Day 3: “For Now I Know”

READ: Genesis 22:1-34

EXPLORE:

I (Stephen) remember it like it was yesterday. I was sitting in a library and studying Genesis for a class in seminary. I had always wrestled with Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, but I had never thought about how the angel of God responded during Isaac’s release. We read in Genesis 22:11-12, *“But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”*

The underlined phrase above gave me more than a moment’s pause. The test was initiated by God, but now an authorized messenger of God who is described as the angel of the Lord seems to be described as now knowing something which was not previously known. That day, which was more than a decade ago in the library, raised a few different questions in my mind. Namely, does this passage indicate that God tested Abraham without knowing how He would respond? Does this passage indicate that God learns or that God does not know the future?³¹ The succinct answer is “No.” In the space we have below, I’d like to highlight how we can deal with puzzling questions like these in God-honoring ways.

We must see a single verse within the scope of Scripture. When we observe this passage in the biblical context, we are met with consistent reminders that God knows all things, including the future.³² It is unwise to grow skeptical of a truth revealed throughout Scripture when it seems obscure in a singular text. We need to notice the nuance visible by the messenger. It is God who tests Abraham, but it is the angel of

³¹ Some open theists have falsely asserted that God does not and cannot know the future.

³² See Isaiah 46:10 and Psalm 139:4 for two examples among many.

God who alludes to *now knowing* that there is a fear of God. To be clear, even if it is supposed and well-supported that the angel of God is the pre-incarnate second person of the trinity, the Hebrew conception of “knowing” does not necessarily have to mean that it was purely an act of learning.

For example, the Hebrew term “*yada*”, meaning to know, does not solely mean that an individual learns, but that an individual can be brought to experience something as true. So, regardless of the identity of the angel of God responding to Abraham’s faith, the passage warrants being read not as learning, but as an act of experience of Abraham’s faith in time. The angel of the Lord has been brought to experience Abraham’s fear of God. His self-disclosure communicates as much. With these truths in mind, there are a few things we must not do!

We cannot label the biblical text as contradictory any more than we can dismiss this angelic disclosure as untrustworthy. Great damage is done when we study poorly or interpret Scripture negligently. We have been given the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, our church family, and wise church leadership to help us wrestle with the realities being communicated in the Bible well. In this case, we shouldn’t fear honest questions which are met with a humble disposition and wise study.

BIG IDEA: Genesis 22 does not indicate that God is ignorant to the future. A biblically thoughtful study of honest and humble questions demonstrates this as true.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What other passages can you find in Scripture about God knowing the future?

- **Question:** Sometimes we think of “knowing something” as only intellectual. How might a better, more biblical understanding of knowledge help us to understand what is being communicated in v. 12?

Week 17: Genesis 22:1-24

Day 4: The Sacrificial Provision of God

READ: Genesis 22:1-24, Hebrews 11:17-19, and Romans 8

EXPLORE:

Expounding upon the faith demonstrated by Abraham in Genesis 22, the author of Hebrews writes, *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”*³³

I (Stephen) have heard it said simply that Abraham lived as though death was not the end. Hebrews helps us see this clearly. In fact, the New Testament holistically highlights Jesus Christ as the beloved, sacrificed Son who, unlike Isaac, was not spared. Moreover, Abraham was convinced based upon the clearly repeated promises of God that even if his son were to die, God would bring him back in order to bring about his blessing. The more we look and the deeper we study, the more apparent the connections to the gospel will become!

As a foreshadowing picture of Jesus, Isaac was to be sacrificed on a mountain in the region that would one day become Jerusalem.³⁴ Just as the cross of Christ was eventually placed on Simon the Cyrene, Isaac was made to carry the wood that would have been associated with his death.³⁵ Look specifically at Genesis 22:14. We are told that Abraham called the mountain *“The Lord will provide”*; as it is said to this day, *“On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”*³⁶ I want to state it clearly as it would have been understood for the ancient audience! The mountain of God’s provision stood as a reminder that, one day, a future

³³ See Hebrews 11:17-19 for reference.

³⁴ See 2 Chronicles 3:1 for a geographic connection to the region.

³⁵ See Genesis 22:5 and Luke 23 for reference.

³⁶ See Genesis 22:14 for reference.

atonement would come. A future sacrifice would come, and God would provide once again!

In the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the angel of the Lord stopped the death of Isaac. Two thousand years later, though, the very same mediating God would intercede and receive the death our sins deserved. Romans 8 makes this connection crystal clear. Expounding on how sinful humanity can be justified by God in Christ, the apostle Paul wrote, *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*³⁷

Just as God provided a way for Isaac to be spared, He has made a way through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus for all those who would believe.

BIG IDEA: The New Testament highlights Jesus Christ as the beloved, sacrificed Son who, unlike Isaac, was not spared.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Summarize the connections you have seen and studied between Genesis 22 and the atoning work of Christ.

- **Activity:** Read and meditate upon the verses detailed below.
 - John 3:16-21, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 5:1-2, I John 1:5-2:6

³⁷ See Romans 8:31-34 for reference and the whole chapter for context.

Week 17: Genesis 22:1-24

Day 5: The Sacrifice of a Son

READ TOGETHER: Romans 8:31-39, Hebrews 11:17-19, and 1 Peter 1:7

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

After these things God tested Abraham. Abraham had already led a full life, but not quite full enough according to God's standards. Recently he had to send his son Ishamel away. He had a peace treaty with Abimelech. Abraham was probably hopeful for a "happily ever after" ending to his life. But God had other plans. Abraham would have to endure one of the most difficult tests any human has ever had to endure.

God commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of Moriah. This seems like an ungodly command. But God gave this command to foreshadow His own Son's death on the cross. Amazingly Abraham did not hesitate to obey the command of God as he rose early in the morning to set off. This was a three day's journey which gave Abraham plenty of time to think about what God had commanded him to do. This time only built Abraham's faith instead of creating more doubts. Abraham was confident that both he and Isaac would return to the young men.

Abraham laid the wood of the burnt offering on Isaac. Isaac carried the wood for his own offering as Christ would carry the cross for his own offering. When they came to the place which God had told him, Abraham built the altar and bound Isaac on top of the wood. Isaac did not resist his elderly father but acted in complete submissive obedience. This too points us to Christ. Christ did not resist His Father's will but was willing was bound and executed.

The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from killing his son, but Abraham was willing. Abraham not only proved to love God more than his own father (whom he left) but also his own son. Abraham trusted that God would provide a sacrifice. God provided with a ram and Abraham was able to praise God for sparing his only son. The most remarkable thing we learn in Scripture is that God did not spare His only Son for us. God did indeed sacrifice His only Son so that we could be made sons of God.

BIG IDEA: Abraham's remarkable faith points us to God amazing love for us in Christ Jesus

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What are some precious things in your own life that God has asked or is asking you to give up?

- **Activity:** Name some other interesting commands that God gives in the Bible.



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