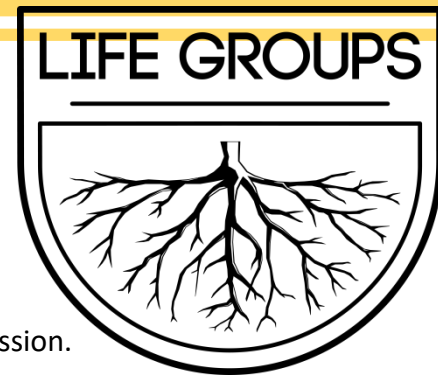


Genesis/The Visit/Chapter 18:1-15



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Have you ever been disappointed in God because the circumstances you faced were not what you expected? What did you think about Him during that time? How did it affect your faith in Him?

The story of Abraham in Genesis gives us one of the best pictures of what faith in God looks like through the ups and downs of life. One of the reasons Abraham's example is so important for us to learn from is because he wasn't perfect. God promised to do amazing things in Abraham's life, but choosing to trust those promises was a struggle for Abraham. Through his story, we see that God makes promises to His children, and we can trust those promises, no matter how laughably impossible they seem. True faithfulness, birthed in us by the Holy Spirit, is perseverance with God through all seasons of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What insight, lesson, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **Why does Abraham respond the way he did to those three visitors and what does that say about his faith at this point in his life (vv. 1-8)?**

Abraham was being the ideal host and behaved in fashion with how the cultures around behaved when they had honored guests visit. Kent Hughes provides a great response on this idea:

"Abraham's response was spontaneous and from the heart as, despite his hundred years, he ran toward the men and bowed low to the ground before them in warm respect. The patriarch apparently sensed from their appearance that the visitors must be honored."

Abraham exhibited trust in God not simply by believing facts about Him, but by trusting His character. Abraham's actions were a direct result of his faith. During moments when doubt overshadows our faith, God may send messengers who remind us of His power. Abraham

and Sarah entertained angels unaware. Oftentimes, believers entertain messengers thinly disguised as impossible problems where only the Lord's power can intervene. Be ready; in those moments God's power can intervene.

3. Why does Sarah laugh to herself, and why do you think she then lied about it?

In keeping with western Asian customs, the host's wife was not permitted to be in the presence of male visitors. But since her tent walls were thin and the conversation was interesting, Sarah was listening to every word. During or after the meal the Lord confirmed the promise made in 17:21, that in about a year's time Sarah would already have given birth to a son.

Laughter revealed the disbelief in Sarah's hearts. She could not imagine how they would have a son at their old age, something for which both of them had longed for decades. But when we compare the two individuals—Abraham's obedience and Sarah's lie—we are reminded of the importance of trusting the promises of God, no matter how impossible they might seem. Sarah's laughter expressed her skepticism. Yet the Lord, who heard her laugh and knew her heart, reminded Abraham and Sarah through a rhetorical question that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

Sarah believed her reality trumped God's word as we stated in our points on Sunday. Encourage the group to think through the follow up question below along this idea:

a) Is there anything in your own life that you believe trumps God's word?

4. In what area of your life do you most often doubt God's power? Why is that aspect of your life most susceptible to a lack of faith?

God often reminds us of His power when we are powerless. Financial, emotional, and spiritual strains can divide our faith as well as our families. God knows our hearts and the areas that we lack faith the most in. God often uses situations in our lives and others around us to show us the areas that we doubt God's power.

Sometimes we don't even realize we are doubting God's power because we naturally assume the right path is the easier humanly possible one rather than trusting in God's power and going in that direction. Encourage the group to think through what areas they are not trusting God or not being willing to trust God.

5. What is the purpose of the Lord's visit with Abraham? Have you thought about whether you have a seat at the Lord's table?

We discussed on Sunday the main reasons why God visited Abraham. It was exercising spiritual intimacy with Abraham by showing that he was not just his God by his friend as well by sitting down for a meal. This visit was also for Sarah and not just Abraham, God

establishes her faith in this visit as well. Kent Hughes also gave another great response on how why God visited Abraham like this:

“Abraham needed the assurance of this first covenantal meal because in the next hours he would experience the final separation from his nephew Lot. Lot would come to the edge of doom, his wife would be judged, his family lost, and his possessions stripped away. In anticipation for these harrowing experiences, God gave himself afresh to Abraham-his friend.”

- a. How is Jesus a reminder to us of God’s faithfulness?

Kent Hughes explains well how this story foreshadows the same meal that Jesus had with his disciples:

“We should note that four hundred years later the Lord held a covenantal meal with family of Abraham on the eve of the fulfillment of the covenant of the law (Exodus 24:5). We should note even more that the new covenant was celebrated with a covenantal meal when Jesus took the cup and said, “This cup...is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20)”

6. Did he save you from unbelief by your own power or his?

As we learned on Sunday, for us to belong at the Lord’s table, we need to trust God with our life and there is nothing that we can do by our own doing to be saved. John Piper gave a great explanation on this idea when he was comparing Isaac and Ishmael:

“What is the difference between a “child of the flesh” and the “children of promise”? The difference is that ordinary human resources bring children of the flesh into being, but the sovereign power of God’s promise brings the children of promise into being. You see this in verse 9: “For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son.’” In other words, Abraham tried to make an heir for God’s promise by the human initiative, that is, out of flesh (Ishmael), but God said, “No, heirs of promise come into being through supernatural, divine intervention. That is what it means to be a Christian — an heir of God’s covenant promises. That is how you became a Christian.”

7. Why won’t God opt for anything less than the path of impossibility?

John Piper talked about this very idea at length in his sermon on “The Issac Factor” and has the response below:

“God waits until it is humanly impossible for the child of the covenant to be born in order to show that it is not by human effort that the covenant people will be created. It is a work of divine and sovereign grace. The formation of a people of God for the sake of his name from all the families of the earth is not a human creation. That is why Ishmael would not qualify as the covenant child. Symbolically he stood for the work of the flesh, the product of Abraham’s presumption and unbelief.

There it is. That's the reason God will not settle for anything less than the path of impossibility: he aims to show that nothing is too difficult for the Lord. His purpose in all he does is *to magnify his sovereign grace and keep us in our humble place*. This is "The Isaac Factor" — and it is exactly what God did."

8. In what area of your life do you need to believe that nothing is too hard for God? What keeps you from believing this?

John Piper gave a sermon on this passage and referenced Henry Martin's life as a great example on believing that nothing is too hard for God. He stated the following in his sermon which gives a great statement on how to respond to this idea:

"Finally, in his last illness, as he struggled to complete his translation he wrote,

If I live to complete the Persian New Testament, my life after that will be of less importance. But whether life or death be mine, may Christ be magnified in me! If he has work for me to do, I cannot die.

In other words, because nothing is too hard for God, you are immortal until the work he has for you to do is done."

Encourage the group think through how they can have the same mentality as Henry Martin and other inspirational missionaries for believing nothing is too hard for God. Also encourage the group to be honest on the areas they are struggling with the most to believe in this truth.

Conclusion

Knowing God's purpose and submitting to that purpose are two different matters. God's promises may as well be scrawled in stone, preserved for all of eternity to witness. That's how confident He is that He will keep His word, but the question is never really about His confidence—it's about ours. We can trust God, no matter how impossible the situation might seem, because God always keeps His promises.

PRAYER

Pray for a better understanding of God's faithfulness. Thank God for being the God of all people. Praise Him that He orchestrated people in the most unlikely circumstances to redeem the world through Christ. Ask God to use you to extend His blessings to others. Also pray that the Holy Spirit will help you learn to trust God's promises and stand in amazement at what He does.



FURTHER STUDY



Psalm 25:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ The LORD confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them.

Jude 24-25 (NIV)

Doxology

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Additional Resources

Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/sarah-laughed/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/friend-god/>

Articles –

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/faith-and-power-god/>

Sermon-

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-anything-too-hard-for-god>