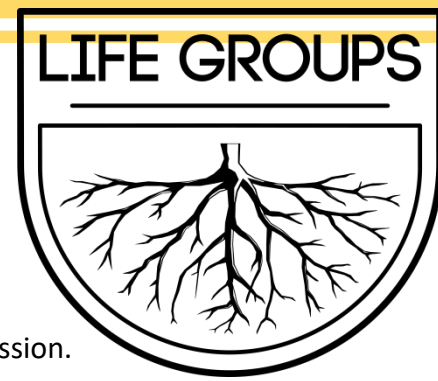


## Genesis / The Grace of God's Word / Chapter 21:1-34

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### INTRODUCTION

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

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** What is the longest that you have waiting for something that you really, really wanted?

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. The story of Isaac's birth and the events that preceded it remind us we can trust God, no matter how impossible the situation might seem, because God always keeps His promises.

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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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. **Finally, the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise came about. What does Sarah's pregnancy teach us about God? What does Sarah's pregnancy teach us about faith?**

God is a promise-keeping God. He promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, and when it seemed all hope was lost for that promise to come to pass, God made it happen. God is full of wonderful surprises. God knows we are fragile and that our faith can be fickle, but if we live in faith, even when it is small, God will forgive us of all our sins and fill our lives with His grace. Kent Hughes gives us a great picture of that with the quote below:

Sarah's pregnancy was, at the time, certainly the most celebrated of all pregnancies. Pregnant at ninety with baby number one! It was, of course, initially her secret—and then she informed Abraham in hushed excitement. Did Sarah at first try to hide her pregnancy from the camp? She may well have been too sick to hide anything! Besides, everyone knew everything in Tent City. Sarah went on to radiant full-bloom and then to the discomforts of full-term. All the preparations had been long made when her labor began—at four score and ten years. When the baby's cry rose across the camp, there were tears and festive shouts that all would long remember.

God had been faithful to his word. This is stressed three times in the first two verses so that we would not miss it.<sup>1</sup>

**3. What does it make you think about God that He had Abraham and Sarah name their son “Laughter”? How was Abraham and Sarah’s laughter different this time?**

When you talk to random people on the street or even people in the church about what they think God is like, you’ll probably get something along the lines of a God who is angry and ready to discipline as soon as somebody makes a mistake. If you told someone that the God of the Bible is a God of laughter, you would probably a surprised and puzzled response.

We see a very special attribute of the God of the bible in this story. We see a God who is about joy and laughter and wants his creation to also enjoy joy and laughter. Kent Hughes puts this idea well below:

And now new mother Sarah gave a joyous utterance that had the form of a song: “And Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.’ And she said, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age’ ” (vv. 6, 7). There was laughter everywhere. The old man and his wife laughed and continued to laugh as they held tiny Laughter in their arms. Baby Isaac cooed and laughed. The camp chuckled out loud. Heaven smiled.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Did receiving the promise of a son cure Sarah of her jealousy (vv. 9-11)? What caused Sarah to lose sight of God’s grace and fall back into jealousy?**

We see very clearly in the later part of this chapter after Isaac is born, Sarah is still struggling with her jealousy. Kent Hughes gives us a good explanation into what caused Sarah to fall back to her old sin of jealousy:

Ishmael’s mocking laughter does not suggest violence, but Sarah imagines the ominous trajectory and proportions to which the laughter could go. However, there is simply no warrant for thinking that Sarah was acting righteously here. She had no affections for Hagar and Ishmael, even though they had been a part of the family for years. Nor did she seem to care at all what happened to them. Sarah was a noble woman (cf. 1 Peter 3:6), and her instincts were sound. But her actions at that time were far from noble.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 292.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 293–294.

Sarah would brook no possible sharing of the inheritance. She wanted the problem uprooted and cast away.<sup>3</sup>

She forgot about what God had done for her despite her lack of faith and disobedience. She fell back to her old sin.

**5. What causes you to lose sight of the grace of God in your life? How can we maintain our focus on God's grace when life is difficult? What about when life is good?**

While we might expect Sarah's suspect faith and bitter resentment to disqualify her from receiving God's great promise to give her a son who would bless all nations, this is not the case. Thankfully, God's blessing is not contingent upon our performance or good deeds. Grace, by its very definition, is always undeserved.

In Genesis 21 God follows through in fulfilling a promise that neither Abraham or Sarah deserved by giving them a son in their old age. When Sarah first laughed at God's promise (Gen. 18:12-15), she revealed her doubt in His power and her lack of faith in Him. But now that God had made good on His promise, Sarah's laughter revealed her awe and amazement at what He accomplished through her. Finally, she arrived at a place of trust and gratitude.

God was gracious to both Abraham and Sarah in this situation as Hagar and Ishmael are being sent away. Kent Hughes states it well with the quote below:

Abraham's breaking heart was comforted by the promise that great futures awaited both his boys. Isaac was the one through whom the promise would be realized. And Ishmael would father a great nation. Both boys had prodigious futures.<sup>4</sup>

We can look to stories like this as a reminder in our own lives during tough and good times to remember God's goodness and grace.

**6. How might we encourage others in times of waiting on the Lord through Abraham and Sarah's example?**

Like we just discussed in our previous questions there are many lessons that we can learn from Abraham and Sarah's story and God's Word can be trusted. We can have faith in what God says and trust His promises. God's Word is the best source for encouragement, and it can be used in all sorts of ways to encourage others. Those around us might be going through a trial and we can point them to God's Word and this section of scripture for

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 294–295.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 295.

encouragement. Kent Hughes points out some of these great words of encouragement through the quotes below:

Abraham's God was the Everlasting One whose will for man cannot be thwarted. This awesome view of God would now inform all of Abraham's dealings. It was this exalted understanding that would be tested in his offering up of Isaac, and that also would help him to stand.<sup>5</sup>

Faith does not grow in a hothouse but in the unpredictable climates of life.<sup>6</sup>

## **7. What areas in your life is God using to mold and polish you?**

As we have been learning through this section of Genesis on Abraham, we have seen that God uses the situations in people's lives to shape, mold, and polish as part of the process of sanctification. God used the good and the bad, the mistakes and the moments of faith, and everything in between to mold Abraham into the man of faith God had designed Him to be. Kent Hughes stated this idea well with the quotes below:

The truth is, without affliction and hardship we would be trivial, superficial, flat-sided beings—people without depth or substance—with shallow faith. This truth is a life-changing revelation when taken to heart. God works in and through the vicissitudes of life to mature our faith. Take this to heart!<sup>7</sup>

Our calling, like that of those who have gone before, is to submit to the friction and polishing for what it is—the sweet grace of God.<sup>8</sup>

- a. **What promises of God could you hold on to this week as you seek to cultivate a heart of gratitude to God? What might it look like for you not only acknowledge God's grace but also savor it?**

## **8. After hearing this passage, tools for today, and questions, what is one next step you need to take today?**

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 296.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 297.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 295.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 297.

## Conclusion

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. The story of Isaac's birth and the events that preceded it remind us we can trust God, no matter how impossible the situation might seem, because God always keeps His promises.

## PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him. Thank Him for sending Jesus and for the salvation available through Him. Pray that God will open our eyes to Jesus' identity and His work in our lives through this study.

Pray for the discussions during the group, the next steps, and for God to continue to work in your group's life. Pray for the group to work through the tools for today that apply to them and for the prayer requests that are lifted up from the group.



### FURTHER STUDY



#### **Psalm 119:65–68 (NIV)**

**65** Do good to your servant according to your word, LORD.

**66** Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I trust your commands.

**67** Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

**68** You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.

#### **Romans 4:2–4 (NIV)**

**2** If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

**3** What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

**4** Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.

### **Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV)**

**14** “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

**15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

**16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

### **Devotionals-**

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/children-promise>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/he-who-laughs-last>

### **Articles –**

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/children-promise>

### **Sermon-**

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/living-by-faith-in-future-grace/excerpts/the-promise-driven-life>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-word-of-god-living-active-sharp>