



SCRIPTURE DEVOTION | GENESIS 17-18:21

Last week in our study of Genesis, we observed Sarai & Abram's attempt to accomplish God's promise themselves despite God's trustworthy words and actions. This led to the birth of Ishmael, Abram's son, with Hagar and great strife within the family. This week we will look more closely at the expanding promise that God has made to Abram, now Abraham, their (Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants) calling in that covenant, and the Lord's faithfulness to provide clarity and assurance along the way.

TEXT-BASED ONE ANOTHERING QUESTIONS

This time for group members to practice confession, repentance, accountability, biblical encouragement, etc. with the help of the Holy Spirit through his word. Encourage group members to read the portion of scripture being discussed before group.

We will look at our text today as three phrases: God, the covenant keeper, renames Abraham and Sarah, the promise of descendants and their call to obedience, and the laughter of Abraham & Sarah.

- In our first section of the story today (Genesis 17:1-8), we see God's progressive revelation of the promise he made to Abram in Genesis 12. In Genesis 17, God introduces Himself as El Shaddai, or God Almighty, meaning simply, "there is nothing He can not do." God then describes his covenant with a 99-year-old Abram, a covenant that will make him and his descendants into many nations. At this time, he renames Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah to reflect this coming blessing and these expansive nations.
 - Why do you think God introduces Himself to Abraham as El Shaddai or God Almighty now?
 - Are there any circumstances, areas of suffering, or areas of sin that you think or believe are beyond God's ability to work according to his purpose and your good?
 - How does knowing that "there is nothing He can not do" encourage you in these areas?
- After God renames Abraham and Sarah, he describes their call to keep His covenant in Genesis 17:9-14. . God instructs Abraham and Sarah that all the males of their household would be circumcised as a sign of this covenant that God had made, which would also serve as a reminder of their call to keep it, to remain court out of the world, set apart for the Lord. Later, in Genesis 17:15-27, God promises a son to be born from Abraham and Sarah, who are both in their 90's. Abraham laughs in response to this revelation. Nevertheless, God assures Abraham that He will accomplish this and also promises to bless his first son Ishmael. Abraham is then obedient to circumcise all the men in his household as a sign of this covenant.
 - Last week we discussed the unilateral nature of God's covenant with Abraham, but here he seems to indicate that Abraham and his descendants will be responsible for keeping this covenant. How do you reconcile these two ideas?
 - Are we able to perfectly keep this covenant blamelessly with God? If not, what then is required?
 - Consider this quote, "*Keeping the covenant has never been the means by which God's people earn a righteous standing in His eyes. Instead, it demonstrates the delight they have in belonging to Him and their consent to His ownership of them by faith in His goodness and promises; faith is the only way those who have been marked can enjoy the full benefits that come with belonging to Him (Rom. 4).*" Another word for the phrase "keeping the covenant" could be the world obedience. The obedience described here is one that is fueled by grace and a delight in being ruled by a good and loving God.
 - In your life today, in what areas are you walking in obedience out of a delight in belonging to God? In what ways have you been encouraged and strengthened as you have obeyed Him?
 - In your life today, in what area are you walking in obedience filed by a desire for right standing before God rather than the joy that comes from understanding that right standing has already been accomplished on your behalf by Jesus?
 - In your life today, are there any areas in which you are walking in disobedience? Spend time with group members confessing these areas and praying for one another.

- In this story, we see Abraham fall on his face and laugh at the reality that is going to God will give him a descendant through him and his wife. How do you think remembering God as El Shaddai could help Abraham trust Him in deeper and more intimate ways?
- Today, in our last section of scripture, the Lord appears with two others to Abraham in Genesis 18:1-21. Abraham extends excellent hospitality to the Lord as He shares that Abraham and Sarah will bear a son within the year. Sarah, listening from within the tent, also laughs at this idea, knowing she is well past the child-bearing age for women. The Lord inquires about her laughter stating, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah, in fear, denies that she laughed, but the Lord persists in exposing the truth of her laughter.
 - Compare the two laughs of Abraham and Sarah. How are these similar, and how are they different? What evidence in these verses do you see that helps us understand this laughter? (hint: one is marked by humility (bowing) and amazement (marveling); one is characterized by disbelief (fear) and doubt(looking at herself/body rather than God).)
 - Why do you think God engages Sarah's laughter in this way?
 - Can you think of a time in your life when God working miraculously seemed laughable, and yet He was faithful?

MISSION

Evangelism

We want to be intentional in our everyday lives to have gospel conversations with people that don't know Jesus. These people God has placed in our path are not projects, but friends. Friends we long to see have the hope and joy of Christ!

- Have each group member choose one person they are going to pray for and initiate conversations with about Jesus. Each week, follow up:
 - Were they able to share the gospel with them, encourage them, or pray with them this week?
 - How can the group pray for the group member & the person they are walking with?
 - What is one next step they can take with this person? Can they ask them to church? To come to community group? Read the Bible together? Etc.
- The weather is beginning to change, work together as a group to plan a block party where your group can meet and bless the neighborhood that you meet in each week.

Missions

We want to be mindful and prayerful for the work the Lord is doing in the world. There are tons of ways you can encourage your group members to engage in God's work around the world. Below are some ideas for this week:

- Read a recent update from your group's missionary/missionary family and pray for them.
 - Consider putting together a care package for them! Supply a list of items people can bring. Have kids draw cards/notes. Etc!
- Have a potluck with food from a specific country, pray for that country, the churches there, etc. Check out prayercast.com for country prayer info!

PRAYER

- Check in on life (ex. relationship with Christ (prayer & word), their marriages/singleness, children, etc.) to discover prayer needs.
- Spend time in confession & prayer for those who have shared areas of disbelief, wrong beliefs, sin, etc. during discussion time.
- If you have more time or separate time for men & women choose 1-2 questions on the following page for accountability time or create your own.

ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

Knowing the members of your group, and having heard about their week, choose 1-2 questions for your time of confession, encouragement, & prayer. We have gathered these questions from various resources, so feel free to jump around this document or come up with your own questions to best serve your group.

- Have you been a testimony this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your words and actions?
- Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate thoughts about someone who is not your spouse this week?
- Have you lacked any integrity in your financial dealings this week, or coveted something that does not belong to you?
- Have you been honoring, understanding and generous in your important relationships this past week?
- Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind their back or face-to-face?
- Have you given in to an addictive behavior this week? Explain.
- Have you continued to remain angry toward another?
- Have you secretly wished for another's misfortune so that you might excel?
- Did you finish your reading this week and hear from the Lord? What are you going to do about it?
- Did you spend significant time with God through His Word, prayer, quiet time, devotions, and other spiritual disciplines? How consistent? Is He your driving force?
- What blocks your growth in Christ? What blocks growth, in your other relationships, from becoming more mature and effectual?
- Have you faithfully served the Lord, His people, and the lost?
- Did you go and participate in church activities and worship this week? How so? Why not?
- Have you made your family a priority? What noteworthy activity or deed did you do for your spouse and/or family?
- How have you struggled with sin? What are the sins that have weighed down your walk with God this week?
- What did you do to enhance your relationship with your spouse/friends? What can you do to make that relationship better?
- In what ways has God blessed you this week? How have you shared your blessings?
- What disappointments did you face? Did they consume your thoughts? What did you do about it? What can you learn?
- Have you committed any sexual sin? Did you look at someone lustfully? Have you been alone in a compromising situation? Have you been flirtatious? Have you struggled with pornography or "romance novels?" Have you exposed yourself to any sexually oriented material? Did you put yourself in a situation with anyone that could appear to be compromising, even though it may not have been?
- Have you shared your faith? In what ways? How can you improve? Have you had an opportunity to share with a non-Christian?
- How well are you handling your finances right now? Have your financial dealings been questionable?
- Have you been trustworthy? Have you lied? Stolen? Cheated? Been dishonest or manipulative? Have you elevated yourself over another for your own personal agenda? What about your language and attitude?
- Have you been prideful? Have you been guilty of gossip or anger? Slandered? Shown indifference? Been greedy? Not controlled your tongue?
- Have you demonstrated a servant's heart? How so? What have you done for someone else this week?
- Did you struggle with a disappointment this week? How did you handle it?
- Have you respected and treated your classmates, co-workers and peers graciously by showing them compassion and the love of God in your words and deeds? What can you do to enhance your relationships here?
- How is your level of character, according to the comparison of Gal. 5:22-23 versus Gal. 5:19-21?
- How did you practice joy this week? Have you had a thankful attitude toward God? Have you struggled with anger toward God? How so? What can you do about it?
- Have you taken care of the temple of the Holy Spirit with rest, sleep, exercise, healthy eating, etc? What about addictions, gluttony, or substance abuse?
- Have you been honest while answering these questions? If not, how so? If not, why?
- How can we support you as a group?