

FROM CREATION TO CHAOS

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the**GOSPEL**PROJECT



Unit 3



the **GOSPEL** PROJECT
VOLUME 1

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LEADER GUIDE

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A PEOPLE PROMISED

MAIN POINT

Jesus makes us the children of Abraham and the people of God.



GENESIS 11:27-30 • GOD CHOOSES TO WORK THROUGH UNLIKELY PEOPLE

27 These are the family records of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran fathered Lot. **28** Haran died in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans, during his father Terah's lifetime. **29** Abram and Nahor took wives: Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. **30** Sarai was unable to conceive; she did not have a child.

GENESIS 12:1-3 • GOD PROMISES A NEW PEOPLE THROUGH ABRAHAM

1 The Lord said to Abram: Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

GENESIS 15:1-6 • GOD USES IMPERFECT PEOPLE

1 After these events, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great. **2** But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" **3** Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir." **4** Now the word of the Lord came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." **5** He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous." **6** Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

INTRO OPTION 1

BELIEVE IT!

NO SUPPLIES

Divide your group into two teams for each to make a commercial. One commercial should be about the power of a promise. The other commercial should be about the power of faith.

In today's session, God made a promise to Abraham. It was so powerful that it included Jesus' birth and our salvation. We'll also learn about the power of Abraham's faith. Because of his faith, God counted him righteous. Let's see what we can learn about God's promise and Abraham's faith.

INTRO OPTION 2

INTO THE UNKNOWN

NO SUPPLIES

In Disney's Frozen 2, Elsa was being called to fulfill her purpose, but she was afraid. The scene is captured in the song "Into the Unknown." She said, "Everything I've ever loved is here within these walls," and "I'm afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you." We can feel that way when God calls us to follow Him. We worry about what we may be risking, what we may have to give up, or what God may ask us to do.

In today's session, Abraham was called by God to leave everything he knew. God said to go out from his home and relatives to a land that He would show him. It was a step into the unknown. But he followed God in faith, and it would eventually lead to the blessing of all people.



1. GOD CHOOSES TO WORK THROUGH UNLIKELY PEOPLE

READ GENESIS 11:27-30

HOW CAN GENESIS 11:30 BE SHOCKING?

God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. From Adam to Noah, we read of generation after generation who followed that command. After the flood, God told Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply again. From Noah to Abram, humanity multiplies generation after generation. So, Sarah's barrenness comes as an abrupt and surprising development. There is a sudden break in pattern. For all the problems humanity had in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, barrenness wasn't one of them. To make things worse, the promise of Genesis 3:15 was dependent upon the seed of the woman, and the line of promise has led us to Abram. But Abram and Sarah cannot have children. We're left wondering why God would choose them and how the promise will continue.

WHAT DOES SARAH'S BARRENNESS TEACH US ABOUT HOW GOD WORKS?

God often chooses to work through unlikely people. It may be surprising to us, but if we pay close attention, we will see this pattern emerge again and again throughout the Bible. Other couples were more fruitful, but God chose Abraham and Sarah. Esau was older, but God chose Jacob. Rachel was more loved by Jacob, but God chose Leah to be a mother within the messianic line. Other men were better speakers, but God chose Moses to be His messenger. Saul was greater in stature, but God chose David to be king. God delights in using those who are weak in order to display His strength. God will use us when we are aware of our weaknesses in a way that we are unable to be used if we think we are strong on our own.

2. GOD PROMISES A NEW PEOPLE THROUGH ABRAHAM

READ GENESIS 12:1-3

God promised Abram three things—land, offspring, and blessing. It's no overstatement to say that these promises set the stage for the rest of the biblical story. The Old Testament will trace the progression of these promises, while the New Testament will trace the fulfillment of these promises.

HOW WOULD FOLLOWING GOD HAVE BEEN A CHALLENGE AND SACRIFICE? HOW MIGHT ABRAM'S CALLING COMPARE TO LUKE 14:26-27?



GENESIS 11:27-30

11:30 Obstacles are opportunities for God's power to be displayed.

GENESIS 12:1-3

12:1-3 The promises to Abram aren't out of nowhere, since they pick up on patterns set with Adam and Noah. In Eden, God gave Adam the garden, blessed him and Eve, and commanded them to multiply. At Ararat, God gave Noah a new creation, blessed his family, and commanded them to multiply. A significant development in the pattern with Abram is that the creation mandate now takes the form of a promise. It's no longer merely what God is commanding humanity to do, but what God is promising to do for humanity. The land of promise will be a kind of new Eden, where the line of promise will live in the blessing of God.

12:2 Notice the contrast between Babel and Abram. At Babel, humanity refused to go, instead gathering to make a great name for themselves. But Abram went as God commanded him, and God promised to make his name great. When we seek our own glory, we will find ourselves opposed to God. But when we humble ourselves in obedience to God, He will exalt us (1 Pet. 5:5-6).



BIG QUESTION

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, WERE PEOPLE SAVED BY WORKS OR BY FAITH?

There's a common misconception that the Old Testament is about works and law while the New Testament is about faith and grace. But Genesis 15:6 tells us a different story—"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The apostle Paul taught extensively on this idea in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Paul wrote that Abraham was saved through faith before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:9-11) and before The Law was given (Gal. 3:17-18). According to Romans 4:6-8, King David was also saved by faith and not works. No one can boast of salvation by works—not Abraham (Rom. 4:2-3), not us. God's people have always and will always be saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9).



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus makes us the children of Abraham and the people of God.

God called Abram to walk away from everything that was familiar. Abram had to step out of his comfort zone to follow God's call, leaving friends, family, and familiarity behind. God promised land, but didn't say where. He promised a great nation, but Abram didn't even have a son. Abram's obedience was an act of sacrifice and faith. God's call to Abram reminds us of what Jesus said to his disciples. Anyone who wanted to be His disciple would have to love Him more than family. They had to take up their cross and die to self. Abram is the father of all who believe, and his calling is a prototype for Christ's call to be His disciples.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PRINCIPLE THAT ABRAM WAS BLESSED IN ORDER TO BE A BLESSING?

God uses the word "bless" or "blessing" five times in two verses. God promised to bless Abram, but it is clear that God's intentions stretched far beyond him. Abram was blessed in order to be a blessing. God has blessed us through Abram, but it shouldn't stop with us. The New Testament teaches us to bless others—even our enemies. We can bless others by what we say and by how we serve.

3. GOD USES IMPERFECT PEOPLE

READ GENESIS 15:1-6

HOW CAN WE HAVE FAITH EVEN WHEN WE CAN'T SEE THE ANSWER OR OUTCOME?

Abram could not see how God's promise was going to be fulfilled. In his season of doubt, he had two things to lean on: God's character and God's word. God said, "I am your shield" (15:1). Abram could count on God's faithfulness. God reminded Abram of the original promise (Gen. 12:1-3), assuring him of the future God had planned for him. When we doubt, we must turn to God's character and His Word. He will never forsake His children. He is our shield and His Word is a reminder of His promise and power to complete what He has begun.

ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLE PAUL, HOW ARE WE PART OF THE FULFILLMENT OF GENESIS 15:5? (SEE GAL. 3:6-8, 29 AND ROM. 4:16-18).

Paul said the promise of Genesis 15:5 is fulfilled through the gospel. There's a popular children's song with the lyrics "Father Abraham had many sons...and I am one of them, and so are you." But what does that even mean? Abraham was saved by faith that he might become the father of all who believe. Everyone who belongs to Jesus is a child of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). He became the father of the people of faith "according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be" (Rom. 4:18). The promise that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea finds its fulfillment in the church.



GENESIS 12:1-3

12:1-3 “Although the call is directed to the individual Abram, it is intended ultimately for the salvation of the world’s peoples. The term ‘bless’ and its derivatives, which are the thematic glue of the entire book, dominate the oath, occurring five times. The promise of blessing(s) corresponds to the fivefold appearance of ‘curse’ (3:14, 3:17, 4:11, 5:29, 9:25) in the earlier telling of history (Gen. 1-11).”¹

GENESIS 15:1-6

15:5 In most English translations, the ending of Genesis 15:5 and Romans 4:18 are identical. In translations where the wording isn’t identical, translators use a footnote to show that Paul was quoting Genesis 15:5. So, Paul is, in no uncertain terms, connecting the fulfilment of Genesis 15:5 with the new covenant people.



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

PEOPLE OF GOD

Scripture describes the church as “the people of God” (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term “church” is used in two senses—of individual local churches composed of people who have covenanted together under the lordship of Christ and of the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God’s ruling care while we are protected and cared for by Him.

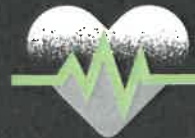


CHRIST CONNECTION

God promised that He would bless the world through Abraham and his family, an unlikely and imperfect people. Jesus Christ, an unlikely but perfect Savior, is the fulfillment of God's promise, the descendant through whom salvation flows to the entire world.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE FACT THAT EVEN ABRAHAM STRUGGLED WITH DOUBTS?

God uses imperfect people. Following God doesn't mean we have perfect faith. At times, even the strongest believers struggle with questions and doubts. It's normal to have questions and hesitations along the way, but the key is to bring them before God. We should be honest, as Abraham was, and listen to God's Word, which reminds us of who God is and of His promises.

WHAT COMFORTS AND FEARS MAY KEEP YOU FROM FOLLOWING GOD'S CALLING?

Abram had to leave his comfort zone to follow God. Often, it isn't our doubts, but our comforts that keep us from following God. We can be more afraid of losing what we have than we are of missing out on what God has for us. The fear of uncertainty may paralyze us at times, but the ultimate comfort is that God will be with us wherever He calls us.

HOW MIGHT OUR LIVES LOOK DIFFERENT IF WE FOLLOWED GOD'S CALLING FOR US?

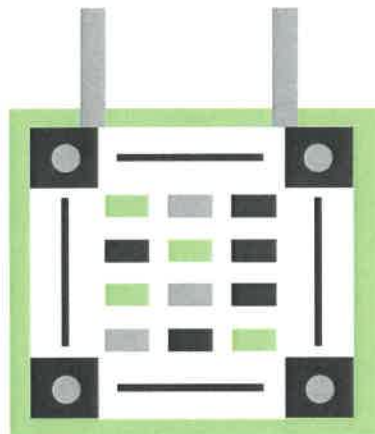
God has a specific plan for each one of us. That may look very different from person to person, but God has called every believer to join in His mission and to imitate Jesus. We should strive to live out the Great Commission, the Sermon on the Mount, and the fruit of the Spirit. God saves through faith. May we share that message in order that the blessing of Abraham may come to all people (Gen. 12:3, Gal. 3:8-9).

A PRIEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

SESSION 2

MAIN POINT

Jesus is a Priest-King who blesses all people.



GENESIS 14:8-9, 11-12, 14-16 • ABRAM IS LIKE A KING WHO RESCUES HIS PEOPLE

8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and lined up for battle in the Siddim Valley **9** against King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against five. ... **11** The four kings took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and went on. **12** They also took Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, for he was living in Sodom, and they went on. ... **14** When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. **15** And he and his servants deployed against them by night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. **16** He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people.

GENESIS 14:17-20^a; HEBREWS 7:1-3, 7 • ABRAM IS BLESSED BY A GREATER PRIEST-KING

17 After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley). **18** Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High. **19** He blessed him and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, **20^a** and blessed be God Most High who has handed over your enemies to you. ... **1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings, **2** and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace. **3** Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. ... **7** Without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior.

GENESIS 14:20^b; HEBREWS 7:4-6 • ABRAM RESPONDS TO GOD'S BLESSING WITH WORSHIP

20^b And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. ... **4** Now consider how great this man was: even Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the plunder to him. **5** The sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have a command according to the law to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their brothers and sisters—though they have also descended from Abraham. **6** But one without this lineage collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.

INTRO OPTION 1

TEST OF LOYALTY

SUPPLIES LIST

INDEX CARDS AND A PEN FOR EACH STUDENT

Give your students an index card and have them write down a list of people who are loyal to them. They can write who they feel loyal to as well. Discuss the following questions as a group:

HOW HAS SOMEONE SHOWN LOYALTY TO YOU? HAS SOMEONE BEEN LOYAL TO YOU EVEN WHEN YOU DID NOT DESERVE IT?

HOW HAVE YOU SHOWN LOYALTY TO SOMEONE ELSE?

In today's session, Abram shows his loyalty to Lot. Lot had moved away from Abram and chose to live in a place full of ungodliness. But when Lot was in danger, Abram risked his own life in order to rescue him. Thankfully, we will see that God is loyal to us even when we do not deserve it.

INTRO OPTION 2

GENEROUS HEART

NO SUPPLIES

There are many ways to show love and appreciation. You can communicate your love for someone by saying it, but it is even better to communicate your love by showing it.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN SHOW LOVE TO SOMEONE ELSE?

HOW DO YOU MOST NATURALLY SHOW LOVE?

In today's session, we see Abram's love for Lot and for God. He shows his love for Lot by risking himself in order to rescue Lot. Generosity is one way we show love for people, but it is also a way to show our love and appreciation for God. How we use our resources can reveal what is in our hearts (Matt. 6:21). God has given so much for us, and we should want to give ourselves back to Him.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus is a Priest-King who
blesses all people.

1. ABRAM IS LIKE A KING WHO RESCUES HIS PEOPLE

READ GENESIS 14:8-9, 11-12, 14-16

Lot had separated from his uncle, Abram, and moved toward Sodom. At some point after he moved to Sodom, four kings set out to defeat and plunder five other kings in the region. The four kings defeated the five, including the king of Sodom, and Lot was taken into captivity. Abram was committed to Lot despite Lot's foolish decision move toward Sodom. At great risk to himself, Abram went after Lot and rescued him from captivity.

HOW DOES MOSES PRESENT ABRAM AS A CONQUERING, RESCUING KING?

Though Abram is never directly called a king, there are clear royal overtones in the promises God made to him. God had promised to make his name great and make him into a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3), promised to give him a land (Gen. 15:7), and promised that he would father a line of kings (Gen. 17:6). In Genesis 14, there are nine kings warring over the promised land and the peoples of the land. Abram defeats the four victorious kings—including the greatest, King Chedorlaomer—with only three hundred men. So, Abram is presented as a king of kings in Genesis 14, foreshadowing the true King of Kings (Jesus Christ) who would come from his family.

HOW IS ABRAM NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT FROM THE KINGS IN THIS STORY?

The kings make war to take people captive. They are violent and self-serving. But Abram is different. He makes war to set the captives free. He takes risk upon himself to rescue those he loves. Like King Jesus, who would come from Abram's line, he is distinctly different from the kings of the world. He uses his power for the good of others to rescue and restore.



GENESIS 14:8-9,11-12,14,16

14:8-9 “The narrative describes the conflict between two warring coalitions of kings, providing a detailed account of persons and places. The outcome of the war is the defeat of Sodom involving the capture of Lot, which establishes the military setting for the growing stature of Abram as a formidable figure in the region...Abram’s political importance is enhanced by the success of the eastern king against the west, since he in turn will later fall to Abram’s militia (v. 15).”¹

14:14-16 Abram’s rescue of Lot begins a pattern in Scripture of a conquering hero who defeats enemy powers, putting himself at risk to rescue his people. In Judges 6-9, Gideon takes three hundred soldiers (a strikingly similar number as Abram) to liberate Israel from foreign kings who have taken the land and peoples captive. In 1 Samuel 30, David defeats the Amalekites with six hundred men to rescue the women and children who had been taken captive. And later, Jesus took captivity captive in his kingly rescue of God’s people (Eph. 4:8).² Jesus has disarmed the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them (Col. 2:15). One day, He will rescue His people from the kingdoms of the earth forever (1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 11:15).



BIG QUESTION

IS MELCHIZEDEK AN APPEARANCE OF CHRIST HIMSELF?

Melchizedek’s true identity has been the subject of debate. There are many parallels between Jesus and Melchizedek, so some believe he was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. Another possibility is that the author of Hebrews was drawing the parallel from a **literary** observation. Genealogies are significant in Genesis— the stories of every major character include their genealogy, birth, and death. So, Melchizedek stands out as a major character whose father and mother and beginning and end are not recorded. So, the author of Hebrews seems to have concluded that Melchizedek **resembled** the Son of God. The bottom line is: Melchizedek points to Jesus, the priest-king who would bring God’s blessing to the covenant people forever.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

**Jesus is a Priest-King who
blesses all people.**

2. ABRAM IS BLESSED BY A GREATER PRIEST-KING

READ GENESIS 14:17-20A; HEBREWS 7:1-3, 7

Melchizedek was a priest of God and a king of righteousness and peace. He was sent by God to Abram to give Abram a blessing. He points us to the greatest King of righteousness and peace—Jesus Christ.

HOW MIGHT MELCHIZEDEK POINT TO JESUS' WORDS IN JOHN 8:58?

Jesus, the Son of God, existed in the beginning (John 1:1) and was before all things (Col. 1:17). This is why Jesus could say, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). The Son of God has no beginning and has no end. He simply exists. Unlike every significant figure in the Book of Genesis, Moses did not list Melchizedek in a genealogy. From a literary standpoint, he had no beginning, as if he were eternal. In this way, he resembles Jesus (Heb. 7:3).

3. ABRAM RESPONDS TO GOD'S BLESSING WITH WORSHIP

READ GENESIS 14:20B; HEBREWS 7:4-6

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM ABRAM'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S BLESSING?

The blessing was ultimately from God—"Abram is blessed by God Most High" (Gen. 14:19). But as a priest of God, the blessing was mediated through Melchizedek. Likewise, Abram's tithe was ultimately an offering back to God, mediated through Melchizedek. We should respond to God's blessings by using our abilities and resources to honor God. Since God has been so good to us, how can we not give ourselves to Him in return?

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU CAN WORSHIP AND PUT GOD FIRST IN YOUR LIFE?

Worship is more than just singing. We worship God by living in a way that shows He is our top priority. Here's a principle to live by: give God the first hour of every day, the first day of every week, and the first dime of every dollar. Worship God with how you use your resources and spend your days. When you do, God will have His rightful place in your life—and others will notice.



GEN. 14:17-20A; HEB. 7:1-3,7

14:18 "Salem is possibly a shortened version of 'Jerusalem' (see Ps. 76:2)...[Melchizedek] provides an interesting example of a priest-king linked to Jerusalem. There appears to have been an expectation that later kings of Jerusalem should resemble him (see Ps. 110:4)."³

7:7 The inferior is blessed by the superior (Heb. 7:3). Though Jesus descended from Abraham, He was greater than Abraham, because the blessings promised to Abraham are fulfilled through Jesus.

GEN. 14:20B; HEB. 7:4-6

14:20B "Tithing is about defeating idols. Tithing is a radical declaration of independence from the tyranny of things, a resounding celebration of the goodness of our God who provides all of our needs with such generosity we have resources to spare. Tithing is about declaring our freedom from things that don't matter. It's spiritual warfare in dollars and cents."⁴

14:20B The pattern between Abram, Gideon, David, and Jesus can be seen again in how they all used what they gained from their victories for worship. Abraham used what he gained to worship by tithing. David set aside the spoils of victory for the building of the temple as a house of worship. Jesus took what he's gained in his victory, the church, and made it into the temple of the Holy Spirit. Tragically, Gideon used his plunder to build an ephod that led Israel into idolatry.⁵



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

CHRIST AS PRIEST

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).



CHRIST CONNECTION

Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, a priest to God Most High, points to a greater priest who would come, Christ Jesus. Jesus would bless all the families of the earth through His sacrifice on the cross so that all who believe might be saved.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM LOT ABOUT THE DANGERS OF SURROUNDING YOURSELF WITH UNGODLINESS?

Though God's blessing was with Abram, Lot moved himself closer and closer to Sodom, a city of wickedness. As we found in this story, that decision had unintended consequences. He became collateral damage because he put himself in the wrong place. Of course, bad things can happen to us even when we are doing what is right (just ask Job). But intentionally surrounding yourself with sin exponentially increases your chances of getting caught up in the crossfire. Perhaps this is a warning to us—don't play with fire. Put yourself in the right place and with the right people.

WHAT DO OUR PRIORITIES REVEAL ABOUT OUR HEARTS?

You will prioritize the things you love the most. One way to examine your heart is to examine how you spend your time. What gets the most attention in your life? What comes first? Another way to examine your heart is to consider how you use your resources. When Abram gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, it demonstrated that God was his priority and treasure. That's why Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:21, 24).

HOW MIGHT ABRAM'S RESCUE OF LOT BE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW WE SHOULD GO AFTER OUR LOST FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

When Abram considered Lot's fate as a captive, he couldn't just stay at home and do nothing. His love for Lot moved him to action. We, too, have family and friends who are captive to sin. The odds may not seem in our favor, but love should compel us to go after them with the gospel. God will work through us to rescue people from bondage and sin as we are moved by love to action.

A PROMISE TESTED

MAIN POINT

God gave His only Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for us.



GENESIS 21:1-5; ROMANS 4:19-21 • GOD PROVIDES A SON

1 The Lord came 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 appointed time God had told him. **3** Abraham named his son who was born to him—the one Sarah bore to him—Isaac. **4** When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. **5** Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ... **19** He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. **20** He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21** because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do.

GENESIS 22:1-10 • GOD DEMANDS A SACRIFICE

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he answered. **2** "Take your son," he said, "your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." **3** So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about. **4** On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you." **6** Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together. **7** Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father." And he replied, "Here I am, my son." Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" **8** Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then the two of them walked on together. **9** When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. **10** Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

GENESIS 22:11-14 • GOD PROVIDES A SUBSTITUTE

11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." **12** Then he said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me." **13** Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. **14** And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said, "It will be provided on the Lord's mountain."

INTRO OPTION 1

GIVE UP WHAT?!

SUPPLIES LIST

INDEX CARDS AND A PEN FOR EACH STUDENT

Give your students an index card and instruct them to write down three things: one thing they like, one thing they love, and finally, the thing they value most. For each one, ask:

WHAT (OR WHO) WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO GIVE THAT UP FOR?

In today's session, Abram was willing to give up Isaac for God. Isaac was most precious to Abram. He loved his son, and Isaac embodied all of Abram's hope for the future. But Abram loved God more and trusted his future in God's hands.

INTRO OPTION 2

TRADING PLACES

NO SUPPLIES

Discuss one of the following scenes from a movie: Katniss volunteering to take Prim's place in The Hunger Games or Belle trading places with her father, Maurice, in Beauty and the Beast.

WHY WERE THEY WILLING TO TRADE PLACES?

In today's session, God provides a substitute for Isaac. The ram takes Isaac's place on the altar. In the same way, Jesus took our place. He loved us and traded places with us, taking our death so that we could have eternal life.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

God gave His only Son
as a substitutionary
sacrifice for us.

1. GOD PROVIDES A SON

READ GENESIS 21:1-5; ROMANS 4:19-21

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM ABRAHAM AND SARAH ABOUT HOW TO TRUST GOD IN THE WAITING?

It had been 25 years since God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Imagine how difficult it would have been to keep believing through 25 years of seemingly unanswered prayer. God's timing is rarely what we would choose, but He is always true to His word. Despite their age, they were convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. We can persevere in our faith even as we wait when we believe that God will keep His word.

HOW DOES THE BIRTH OF ISAAC POINT TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS?

Sarah was barren from her youth and was beyond childbearing years. Paul said that Abraham and Sarah, in terms of the ability to have children, were as good as dead (Rom. 4:19). God's promise, however, does not depend on human ability, but on His power. As the angel said to Mary about Jesus' conception, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Isaac was Abraham and Sarah's firstborn son, and he pointed to a future son of Abraham (Jesus). Jesus would also be born miraculously in order to fulfill the promises made to Abraham.

2. GOD DEMANDS A SACRIFICE

READ GENESIS 22:1-10

God instructed Abraham to give Him the most precious person in his life—Isaac. Isaac represented all of Abraham's hopes for the future and for the fulfillment of God's promises. For Abraham to surrender Isaac to God was to give God his entire future.

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO SURRENDER YOUR DREAMS AND FUTURE TO GOD?

Surrendering your future to God means putting your "yes" on the table in advance. It means deciding in your heart now that you will obey God regardless of what He requires of you. The best way to surrender your dreams for the future to God is to obey Him in the present. Abraham prepared to obey God through small steps along the way. He woke up early, saddled the donkey, and split the wood (Gen. 22:3). Of course, it will look different for you, but you just have to obey God one small step at a time. Sacrificing Isaac wasn't one big act of obedience, but many little steps of faith along the way.



GEN. 21:1-5; ROM. 4:19-21

21:1-2 “Both Isaac and Jesus were named before they were conceived (Gen. 17:19; Luke 1:31). Both mothers conceived through God’s supernatural activity. Both sons fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant. Initially, Isaac began the line, and eventually, Jesus, one of Isaac’s descendants, became the ultimate Son of Promise through whom blessing would come to all nations.”⁶

21:1-3 Isaac also corresponds to the new birth for believers. The apostle Paul compared Hagar to the law and Sarah to the gospel (Gal. 4:24-25). Ishmael was born of the flesh, but Isaac was born by the Spirit through promise (Gal. 4:23, 29). Through faith, Paul says, “You too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise...born as a result of the Spirit” (Gal. 4:28-29).

4:19-21 “Faith goes beyond human potentiality. It acknowledges the existence of One who is not bound by the limitations of the created order. Where God is present, there is nothing that lies outside the realm of possibility. The church of Jesus Christ is in desperate need of those who will insist that God is able to bring to pass anything that is consistent with His nature and in concert with his redemptive purposes.”⁷

GENESIS 22:1-10

22:2 “The identity of the sacrifice is described with heart-rending precision, ‘your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love’ (v. 2).”¹ This is the first time the word “love” is used in the Bible. How fitting that it describes the love of a father for his only son; the son of promise; the son he’d offer up but receive again.



BIG QUESTION

WHY WOULD GOD ASK ABRAHAM TO SACRIFICE HIS SON?

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly condemns child sacrifice (Lev. 18:21, 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31; Jer. 32:35). God is the Creator of life and hates murder and injustice. God was just testing Abraham to see if Abraham really believed Him. God had said that the promises and blessing would continue through Isaac. In offering him up to God, Abraham proved that He truly believed God could even raise the dead, if necessary, in order to fulfill His word (Heb. 11:17-19). In the process, God also provided a preview of the gospel. He would provide a substitute for us, as He did for Isaac, but would raise that Substitute to life and fulfill His covenant promises through His only Son.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

God gave His only Son
as a substitutionary
sacrifice for us.

WHAT DOES THIS STORY TEACH US ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS?

Obedience is the truest measure of faith. When you walk in obedience, you are saying “God knows best, and I trust Him.” In verse eight, that trust was articulated. Abraham said, “God will provide for himself a lamb...” Abraham’s faith was expressed through his words and actions. Jesus said that what is in our hearts will come out of our mouths (Luke 6:45). James said that our faith is only real if it results in obedience (Jas. 2:20–22). In fact, James uses this exact story as the example. James 2:21–22 says, “Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete.” Abraham’s faith was revealed and refined through his works.

3. GOD PROVIDES A SUBSTITUTE

READ GENESIS 22:11-14

HOW MIGHT THIS STORY ENCOURAGE US TO OBEY GOD IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES?

God sees the obedience of His people. He isn’t distracted or occupied with more important things. Abraham and Isaac were alone on the mountain, but God was watching. Even when no one else sees, God sees our faithfulness to Him. This idea is repeated in a number of passages: “But look, the Lord keeps his eye on those who fear him—those who depend on his faithful love, to rescue them from death” (Ps. 33:18-19). “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous” (Ps. 34:15). “For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him” (2 Chron. 16:9).

HOW CAN WE OBEY GOD WITH CONFIDENCE EVEN WHEN WE CAN’T SEE HOW THINGS ARE GOING TO TURN OUT?

As Abraham and Isaac went up the mountain, Isaac noticed they didn’t have a lamb. But Abraham told Isaac that God would provide one (Gen 14:8). When God came through, Abraham called the place, “The Lord Will Provide” (Gen. 21:14). We don’t see what’s coming next or around the next corner. Our perception is limited. We can only obey God one step at a time, but we can be confident that God will provide everything we need to obey Him as we put Him first in our lives.



GENESIS 22:1-10

22:2-3 “Moriah as ‘Mount Moriah’ occurs only once more, but very importantly as the site for Solomon’s temple (2 Chr. 3:1); it is this association that generated the Jewish tradition that the temple mount was the place of Abraham’s sacrifice.”¹

22:6-8. “A picture of the ultimate sacrifice began to emerge as Isaac carried the wood for his own death up the mountain.”⁶ Jesus was the promised son of Abraham and only Son of God. The Father loved the Son, but willingly offered Him up. And like Isaac, Jesus submitted Himself to His Father. But when Jesus got to the top of the mountain, there was no substitute for Him because He was the substitute for us.

GENESIS 22:11-14

22:11-14 Abraham believed God was able to “raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking” (Heb. 11:19). It’s fitting that Isaac was saved from death on the third day (Gen. 22:4), for Jesus was “raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:4).

22:12 Because Abraham offered up his only son, God promised to make his offspring as numerous as the sands of the sea (Gen. 22:16-17). The whole story had repeatedly emphasized that Isaac was Abraham’s only son. Then, in sharp contrast, God promised to give him more children than could be counted. We simply cannot outgive God. As Jesus said, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life” (Matt. 19:29).



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, the long-awaited son of promise, because he believed that God could raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19). But God provided a ram as a substitute Isaac. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the beloved Son whom God the Father did not spare. He was the willing sacrifice God provided as a substitute to pay for our sin.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

WHY WASN'T ABRAHAM'S FAITH IN GENESIS 22 "BLIND FAITH"?

Though Abraham did not know how God was going to provide, his faith was not blind. He'd seen God provide a miracle son. God had demonstrated His power and faithfulness in Abraham's life over a number of years. We, too, can step out in faith by looking back at God's faithfulness before. Faith in God is not a blind leap. It rests upon the foundation of God's past faithfulness and His character. Since God never changes, we can trust that He will act as consistently in the future as He has in the past.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE WITHHOLD FROM GOD?

Abraham didn't withhold anything from God, not even his only son whom he loved (Gen. 22:2). We have a tendency to say, "God you can have x, y, and z, but this other thing is mine." We compartmentalize our lives instead of giving everything to God. Consider your own life—is there something you are withholding from God? Is there something God may ask you to give to Him that you'd think, "No; that's too far. That crosses the line for me." That boundary is much closer than we'd like to think. But it's an important reflective exercise for us to consider as we evaluate our surrender to God.

WHAT ARE SOME STEPS OF OBEDIENCE YOU CAN TAKE TO EXPRESS YOUR FAITH IN GOD EACH DAY?

When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham split the wood the next day and followed God (Gen. 22:3). Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and die to ourselves every day (Luke 9:23). The journey to Mount Moriah can only be taken one step at a time. You aren't going to spontaneously obey God in the big things if you aren't intentionally obeying God in the small things. Every day is an opportunity to be a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). It is a chance to say "yes" to Him in each area of your life. When you are living out your faith in the small, everyday things, you will be able to pass the big tests that come your way.

SESSION 4

A PLAN UNHINDERED

MAIN POINT

God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan.



GENESIS 27:22-24, 30-36 • GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH AN UNCHOSEN SON

22 So Jacob came closer to his father Isaac. When he touched him, he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." **23** He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. **24** Again he asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he replied, "I am."

GENESIS 29:16-28, 31, 35 • GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH AN UNCHOSEN WIFE

20 So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. **21** Then Jacob said to Laban, "Since my time is complete, give me my wife, so I can sleep with her." **22** So Laban invited all the men of the place and sponsored a feast. **23** That evening, Laban took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and he slept with her. **24** And Laban gave his slave Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her slave. **25** When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What have you done to me? Wasn't it for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?" **26** Laban answered, "It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn. **27** Complete this week of wedding celebration, and we will also give you this younger one in return for working yet another seven years for me." **28** And Jacob did just that. He finished the week of celebration, and Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. ... **31** When the Lord saw that Leah was neglected, he opened her womb; but Rachel was unable to conceive. ... **35** And she conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she named him Judah. Then Leah stopped having children.

GENESIS 32:24-31 • GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH A CHANGED FATHER

24 Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. **25** When the man saw that he could not defeat him, he struck Jacob's hip socket as they wrestled and dislocated his hip. **26** Then he said to Jacob, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** "What is your name?" the man asked. "Jacob," he replied. **28** "Your name will no longer be Jacob," he said. "It will be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he answered, "Why do you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. **30** Jacob then named the place Peniel, "For I have seen God face to face," he said, "yet my life has been spared." **31** The sun shone on him as he passed by Penuel—limping because of his hip.

INTRO OPTION 1

GLOW STICK

SUPPLIES LIST

ONE GLOW STICK FOR EACH STUDENT

Give each student in your group a glow stick. Glow sticks can shine bright and become beautiful colors. But something has to happen before they can do that.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO MAKE A GLOW STICK SHINE?

In today's session, God blesses Jacob, but it doesn't happen like we might expect. Jacob wrestles with God and breaks his hip. He would walk with a limp for the rest of his life. But through the breaking, God blesses him. It is through those unexpected situations, the painful and difficult seasons, that we experience God's transformative blessings.

INTRO OPTION 2

IN GOOD HANDS

NO SUPPLIES

Sometimes we doubt that God can use us. We wonder if we are smart enough or good enough. Maybe we feel like we have made too many mistakes. But it's not about how imperfect we are; it's about how perfect God is. Think about it this way:

WHO WOULD WIN A 3-POINT CONTEST? YOU WITH A BRAND-NEW BALL OR STEPHEN CURRY WITH A DEFLATED BALL?

WHO WOULD WIN A RACE? YOU IN A MUSTANG OR JEFF GORDON IN A CLUNKER?

Many have said that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. In today's session, we will see that God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan.



1. GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH AN UNCHOSEN SON

READ GENESIS 27:22-24, 30-36

Isaac was blind and aging, so he decided it was time to pass on to one of his sons the blessing his father Abraham had passed on to him. He chose his oldest son, Esau. But God had revealed before his children's births that the older would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). While Esau was away hunting a meal for the blessing ceremony, Rebekah and Jacob conspired to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead.

HOW DOES THIS STORY ILLUSTRATE THE SAYING, "TWO WRONGS DON'T MAKE A RIGHT?"

God had chosen Jacob as heir of God's blessing and the Abrahamic promises (Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:11-12). Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob (Gen. 25:28) and resisted God's choice of Jacob (Gen. 27:1-3), which had been prophesied before their birth. Yet, Rebekah and Jacob wrongfully deceived Isaac. They took matters into their own hands instead of trusting God. The means do not justify the ends. Doing the wrong thing for the right reason is still doing the wrong thing. It's always better to do the right thing and trust God.

HOW MIGHT YOUR WRONG CHOICES LEAD TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES?

Jacob blatantly and repeatedly lied to Isaac. When you make wrong choices, even for what you believe are good reasons, you may unintentionally create a host of other unforeseen consequences. Though Jacob gained the blessing, he further fractured the relationships in his family, and he never saw his mother again after he fled from Esau.

2. GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH AN UNCHOSEN WIFE

READ GENESIS 29:16-28, 31, 35

There was more than a little dysfunction in Jacob's family. Esau was determined to murder Jacob for stealing his blessing (Gen. 27:41). When Rebekah found out, she urged Jacob to escape to her brother Laban for safety (Gen. 27:42-43). Isaac sent Jacob to Laban so that he wouldn't marry a Canaanite as Esau had done (Gen. 28:1-2). Jacob soon discovered that deception ran in the family, but this time he found himself on the other end of the lies. But God's plan continued forward, despite a series of sinful choices and family problems.



GENESIS 27:22-24, 30-36

27:22-24 “Isaac’s senses of touch and hearing are failing him, and he pleads again for a final, truthful reply (v. 24). His terse, pointed question and its matching answer show Jacob to be an outright liar, not just a savvy negotiator. Jacob affirms his false identity three times (vv. 19,20,24). The parting kiss (v. 27) accents the despicable character of the son’s treachery against his pitiable father. His betrayal with a kiss for personal gain was superseded in Scripture only by Judas’s infamous kiss of Jesus for silver.”¹

27:30 “The near miss probably saved Jacob’s life, judging from Esau’s subsequent, deadly intent (v. 41). The reader senses that the Lord’s hand had accommodated this ‘coincidence.’”²

27:30-36 It is important to understand that the patriarchal blessings in Genesis aren’t just fatherly wishes for their sons. They were speaking prophetically concerning their sons’ futures. Thus, it’s not as simple as Isaac just saying, “Sure, I can give you a blessing too, Esau.” Through Isaac, God had spoken a divine blessing over Jacob. The destinies of each son had been predicted before their births, and here, the matter is settled for good.

GENESIS 29:16-28, 31, 35

29:16-28 “Jacob offered an Old Testament picture of a New Testament principle: ‘Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows’ (Gal. 6:7-8).”⁶



BIG QUESTION

WHY DID GOD CHANGE SOME PEOPLE’S NAMES?

Most parents choose a name for their child based on how it sounds. When parents do choose a name based on meaning, that meaning doesn’t necessarily become their identity. But in Genesis, your name was a significant part of your identity. Jacob’s name meant “heel grabber,” and his character matched his name. Jacob was always trying to trip Esau to get ahead of him. He became known as a deceiver. But God changed his name to Israel, meaning “one who strives.” Ultimately, the covenant family would prevail not because of their striving, but because God would strive for them. It is through God alone that we can truly be made new. A.W. Pink captured the significance of Jacob’s name change when he wrote, “The book of Genesis presents our patriarch in two characters, as he is exhibited to us as Jacob and as Israel...the one telling of how Divine grace found him and the other of what Divine grace made him.”⁸



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan.

HOW DID JACOB, THE DECEIVER, BECOME THE VICTIM OF DECEPTION?

Jacob and Laban agreed that Jacob would work for Laban to marry Rachel. But at the wedding, Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah. Jacob didn't discover it until it was too late. Ironically, Jacob deceived his father because Isaac couldn't see who he was, but here Jacob was deceived because he could not see who Leah was.

HOW WOULD JACOB'S MARRIAGE TO LEAH CONTINUE THE PROMISES MADE TO ABRAHAM?

Leah became the mother of Judah. Jacob later blessed Judah and prophesied that the kings of the people of God would come from his line (Gen. 49:8-10). King David would come from Judah, and King Jesus would come from David. Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Leah, the unloved and unwanted wife, would be the mother of the Messianic line. Yet again, God's plan prevailed despite human sinfulness.

3. GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES THROUGH A CHANGED FATHER

READ GENESIS 32:24-31

When God had blessed and multiplied Jacob, He sent him back to the land of his father. There was only one problem—Esau. Jacob was gripped by fear. The night before he was scheduled to meet Esau, he had a life-changing encounter.

HOW DO DESPERATE TIMES MAKE US CLING TO GOD?

When things are going well, we have a tendency to forget just how desperately we need God. But when we are afraid and uncertain, our crisis can often drive us to God. That's what happened with Jacob. His desperate situation led to desperation for God and His blessing.

HOW MIGHT OUR MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCES ALSO BE WHEN WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S BLESSING?

Jacob was broken before he was blessed. Often, the path to blessing involves brokenness. Abraham and Sarah's faith grew strong through barrenness. King David learned that God was his refuge through Saul's efforts to kill him. Joseph was exalted through the rejection of his brothers and false accusations. The apostle Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, and said, "I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:8-9). Some of our most painful experiences in life are often when we encounter God, when we learn to hold onto Him, and when He changes us.



GENESIS 29:16-28, 31, 35

29:31-35 God chooses what man despises. Despite Laban's lies and Jacob's loveless heart, the Lord had compassion on Leah. As the mother of Levi and Judah, God brought the priestly and kingly descendants through Leah. The unchosen wife became the mother of the chosen line of promise. Leah is the foremother of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

GENESIS 32:24-31

32:25 "This shows us how quickly and how easily God could, when it so pleased Him, bring to an end Jacob's resistance and reduce him to helplessness...Jacob was now brought to the end of his own resources...And this is the purpose God has before Him in His dealings with us. One of the principal designs...is to bring us to the end of ourselves, to show us our own powerlessness, to teach us to have no confidence in the flesh, that His strength may be perfected in our conscious and realized weakness."²

32:25-28 "Men throw broken things away, but God never uses anything until he first breaks it. You'll never show me anybody who has been or will be mightily used of God who has not been broken. There is no blessedness without brokenness."⁹

32:28. "A core belief of my life and ministry: one second in the presence of God can change everything. One second. Everything."¹⁰

32:31-32 "One sign you've encountered God is you walk with a limp, not a strut."¹¹



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

NEW IDENTITY OF A BELIEVER

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).



CHRIST CONNECTION

God delighted in using a broken family to bring blessing to the world, showing that all the glory goes to Him alone. God, however, was not just at work though this family, but in them as well, as He changed and remade them in His image. As Christians, we have been changed and remade in Christ and we now bear His name. This is both a privilege and a responsibility before the watching world.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

HOW DOES THIS STORY REMIND YOU THAT YOU AREN'T DEFINED BY YOUR PAST?

Jacob wrestled with his brother in the womb. He tricked his brother out of the birthright and the blessing. He spent years striving with Laban and trying to outmaneuver him. He somehow defeated them all, but his deceiving and tricking had come to define him. We can be that way, too—defined by our worst choices and character flaws. But here, broken and desperate, Jacob's encounter with God changed him. Jacob's character would no longer reflect his birth name and the decision associated with it, but his new name given by God. When you trust in Jesus, He changes your identity. You aren't defined by your past. You are defined by who you are in Christ.

WHY SHOULD NEARNESS TO GOD ALWAYS LEAD TO HUMILITY AND GRATITUDE?

After Jacob's encounter with God, he said, "my life has been spared" (Gen. 32:30). Jacob acknowledged that he survived only because of God's grace and mercy. That's how every person should feel when he or she truly encounters God. As we draw near to God, we sense more clearly our own weakness and sinfulness and we see more clearly God's perfection and holiness. But because of Jesus, we find ourselves blessed instead of dead. What grace! We, like Jacob, should be humbled by God's mercy and respond with a sense of profound gratitude.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO CLING TO GOD IN DESPERATION?

Unlike with Jacob, God isn't coming down to wrestle with us in the flesh. But there are still ways that we can cling to God so we may see Him and be changed by Him. First, we must cling to the gospel. Paul taught that we live out our faith by "holding firm to the word of life" (Phil. 2:16). Second, we must call out to God in prayer. James wrote, "You do not have because you do not ask" (Jas. 4:2). God's ear is open to you and you can hold onto Him through prayer. Third, we can cling to the church family. The church is the body of Christ. When we support and care for one another, we experience the nearness of Christ.

SESSION 5

A FAMILY PRESERVED

MAIN POINT

God takes evil and turns it for the good of His people.



GENESIS 39:21-23 • GOD IS FAITHFUL TO BE PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE IN ADVERSITY

21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. **22** The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. **23** The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful.

GENESIS 45:1-8 • GOD IS FAITHFUL TO EMPOWER FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

1 Joseph could no longer keep his composure in front of all his attendants, so he called out, "Send everyone away from me!" No one was with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. **2** But he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and also Pharaoh's household heard it. **3** Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But they could not answer him because they were terrified in his presence. **4** Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me," and they came near. "I am Joseph, your brother," he said, "the one you sold into Egypt. **5** And now don't be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. **6** For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. **7** God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. **8** Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

GENESIS 50:15-21 • GOD IS FAITHFUL TO BRING GOOD FROM EVIL

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him." **16** So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before he died your father gave a command: **17** 'Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when their message came to him. **18** His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, "We are your slaves!" **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. **21** Therefore don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

INTRO OPTION 1

COMEBACK STORY

NO SUPPLIES

We all love a great comeback story. In sports and in life, it is inspiring when we see someone overcome seemingly impossible odds.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE GREATEST COMEBACK OR UNDERDOG STORIES YOU HAVE SEEN?

In today's session, we will study the story of Joseph. Joseph was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, and wrongly imprisoned. But God was with him and brought good from all of that evil. He exalted Joseph and used him to save the covenant people and Egypt from famine.

INTRO OPTION 2

REUNITED

NO SUPPLIES

Divide your group into teams of three to five. Challenge each team to come up with a skit where circumstances tear people apart, but they are later reunited.

WHY DO WE LOVE STORIES OF REUNION AND RECONCILIATION?

In today's session, Joseph was separated from his family. But later in his life, God reunited them. In the process, he forgave his brothers of all the awful things they had done to him. God wants to be reunited with us. He extends forgiveness so that we can be a part of His family.



1. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO BE PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE IN ADVERSITY

READ GENESIS 39:21-23

Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. As a result, he was Jacob's favorite son. If that weren't enough family drama, Joseph also had prophetic dreams about his older brothers bowing down to him, which he felt compelled to share. His brothers hated him, so they sold Joseph into slavery and deceived their father into believing Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph ended up in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:1-5). The Lord was with Joseph and exalted him, but just when things seemed to be going well, he was falsely accused and sent to prison (Gen. 39:7-20).

DOES OUR POSITION IN LIFE RELATE TO OUR POSITION WITH GOD? WHY NOT?

Your position before God does not depend on your position in life. Joseph's life was a roller-coaster of ups and downs. He went from the favored son to slavery in Potiphar's house, from Potiphar's house to prison, and from prison to the Pharaoh's right-hand man. The Book of Hebrews says some believers conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, and were mighty in battle, while others were tortured, mocked, beaten, and imprisoned (Heb. 11:32-36). Our place in God's kingdom is entirely unrelated to our significance or prosperity in this world. If anything, Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt. 23:11).

HOW HAVE YOU SENSED GOD'S NEARNESS EVEN THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME?

Moses tells us repeatedly that the Lord was with Joseph. Even though Joseph was separated from his father, he was never separated from his heavenly Father. God's presence was manifested in each season of Joseph's life, even when Joseph was a slave and a prisoner. God's children in every generation have experienced this time-tested grace. God says, "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isa. 41:10), and "I will never leave you or abandon you" (Heb. 13:5).



GENESIS 39:21-23

39:21-23 “Despite the malicious intentions of the brothers or the manipulations of a scorned seductress, the Lord’s purposes for Joseph prevail...At the lowest point in his life, in the bonds of a foreign place, with no friend and no prospect of release, God initiated the steps that brought about deliverance for Joseph, his kin, and the world (cf. Ps 105:17-22).”¹

39:21-23 “In the former narrative, Potiphar extends ‘kindness’ (v. 4), but here, the narrative reports that the Lord was the one who showed ‘kindness’ to Joseph. This coupling of human involvement and divine intercession reflects the author’s theology, for it was ultimately the Lord who propelled Potiphar to bestow special privilege on Joseph.”¹

39:21-23 “The Lord was able to honor Joseph even while Joseph was experiencing injustice. While nothing is said of Joseph’s faith in God’s earlier revelation through the dreams, one has to wonder if they were not part of what allowed Joseph to maintain an optimistic, faithful outlook on life. He knew that God was in charge and that God’s will would be done. Joseph maintained his faith in the revealed promises of God, and he used his giftedness for others.”⁶



BIG QUESTION

HOW DOES JOSEPH’S STORY POINT TO JESUS?

There are a number of striking parallels between Joseph and Jesus. Joseph was the son of a barren woman; Jesus was born of a virgin. Joseph was favored by his Father but hated by his brothers; Jesus was hated by His Jewish brothers but was favored by His Father. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver by his own brothers; Jesus was sold for 20 pieces of silver by His own disciple. Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife but resisted; Jesus was tempted by Satan but resisted. Joseph was left for dead (pit, prison, etc.) because of the sins of others; Jesus died because of, and for, the sins of the world. Joseph rose to power because God was with him. Jesus rose from the dead because He is God. Joseph’s righteous suffering and exaltation preserved God’s promises to Abraham and blessed the nations. Jesus’ righteous suffering and exaltation fulfilled God’s promises to Abraham and saved the world.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

God takes evil and turns it for
the good of His people.

2. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO EMPOWER FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

READ GENESIS 45:1-8

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED UNDESERVED FORGIVENESS FROM SOMEONE?

Forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts you can receive. Almost nothing enables us to experience the heart of God through people like when they forgive us. When a parent or friend extends mercy, it is humbling and freeing. When King David considered God's forgiveness, he wrote, "How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" (Ps. 32:1). Look back with joy and gratitude at all the ways you've been forgiven.

HOW CAN WE GAIN THE STRENGTH TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO HURT US THE MOST?

It is not in our nature to forgive. Instead, we want to get revenge and even the score. The more painful the wound, the more difficult it is to forgive. But when we remember how God has forgiven us—not because we deserved it, but because of His mercy—then we will begin to have the strength to forgive others.

3. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO BRING GOOD FROM EVIL

READ GENESIS 50:15-21

HOW DOES THE PRINCIPLE OF GENESIS 50:20 RELATE TO THE GOSPEL?

At the cross, God took the worst thing that ever happened to anybody and made it the best thing that ever happened to everybody. Judas, the Jewish leaders, and the Roman authorities all committed a great evil. They betrayed, accused, and crucified the only innocent man in Jerusalem. Peter said Jesus was crucified by lawless men, but it was God's plan to bring salvation to us all (Acts 2:21-24).

HOW CAN GENESIS 50:20 GIVE US STRENGTH TO PERSEVERE IN DOING GOOD?

In the short-term, it often appears that evil triumphs. But God will have the final word on our lives and this world. At times, Joseph was surely tempted to think, "What's the point in keeping my integrity when the bad guys keep winning?" But as Paul wrote, "all things work together for the good of those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). The letter of 1 Peter repeatedly tells us to keep doing good and to even be willing to suffer for doing good (1 Pet. 2:12, 3:17, 4:19), knowing that one day, "The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while" (1 Pet. 5:10).



GENESIS 45:1-8

45:1-3 “How all this reminds us of the tenderheartedness of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom we read so often, He was ‘moved with compassion,’ and twice that He ‘wept’—once at the graveside of Lazarus, and later over Jerusalem.”⁸

45:4-8 “Joseph forgives quickly because he is confident in God’s sovereignty.”¹²

GENESIS 50:15-21

50:15-21 “With their father now dead and buried, the brothers began to fear that Joseph would take revenge against them. They had never truly believed that Joseph had forgiven them. Joseph wept, perhaps because of their inability to understand forgiveness. He again stated the principle that all the events of his life had been planned by the Lord and that evil intentions had not prevented God’s plan from being accomplished. They had meant harm to him, but God had used it for good.”⁶

50:19 “Joseph’s response crystallizes the theology of the Joseph narrative as a whole. Divine purpose prohibits Joseph from exacting personal vengeance. This is the role of God; Joseph cannot usurp deity’s designs.”¹

50:20 “Joseph explains that God transformed their evil intention into good, achieving the deliverance of many peoples (v. 20; cf. Prov 16:9). His opening words create a parallelism, which heightens the contrast between human and divine intentions. Evil succumbs to God’s gracious purposes on behalf of his creation.”¹



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

GOD’S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God’s sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many plans are in a person’s heart, but the Lord’s decree will prevail.” In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord’s plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God’s overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

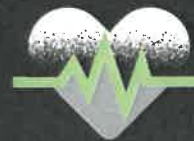


CHRIST CONNECTION

God used the evil deeds of Joseph's brothers for His greater plan of saving Joseph's family from the famine. In a greater way, God used the evil injustice of those who crucified Jesus to bring about His master plan of providing salvation from sin and death.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

WHY DO WE, LIKE JOSEPH'S BROTHERS, DOUBT THAT WE'VE BEEN FORGIVEN?

Joseph had forgiven his brothers in Genesis 45:1-5, but when Jacob died, they thought that Joseph would take revenge upon them (Gen. 50:15). God has forgiven us, but at times, we may wonder if He is somehow still harboring a grudge. On occasion, we may be reminded of the depth of our sin and think, "Surely, God can't forgive me." But we must remember that Jesus has completely atoned for our sins. We also need to remember that no one forced God to forgive us in the first place. God wanted to forgive us; God chose to forgive us. He did so freely and forever.

HOW CAN JOSEPH'S STORY BRING US COMFORT AND HOPE IN THE MIDST OF OUR TRIALS?

A number of features in Joseph's story bring us comfort and hope as believers. Even though Joseph went through many difficult trials, God was always with him. He was able to experience God's blessing and favor in all circumstances. God is able to take even the worst of things and bring something good out of them. When we follow God, we can have hope in His power to exalt His children. As Joseph's story shows and the apostle Peter taught us, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR US TO BE FORGIVING LIKE JOSEPH?

Like the covenant family in the Old Testament, the church family is full of sinful and broken people. It is inevitable that we will sin against others and be sinned against ourselves. All of us need forgiveness, and we all need to forgive. Jesus and the apostles said we should not repay evil for evil; instead, we should love and bless even those who sin against us (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14-17; 1 Pet. 3:9). But how? Peter wrote, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). Joseph, and ultimately Jesus, have shown us the way. May we be a people who love and forgive just as we have been loved and forgiven.



SESSION 6

THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE

DOCTRINE SESSION

MAIN POINT

The Lord rules over all creation.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE **GOD'S PROVIDENCE**

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

ESSENTIAL **CONNECTION**

We have seen God's providence throughout the stories in Genesis: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. While many people made plans (some good and some bad), God's plan prevailed because, ultimately, God rules over all. Today, we will take a closer look at God's providence and how His rule over the world, and our lives, can give us peace in every season.

SCRIPTURE **READING**

COLOSSIANS 1:15-17 • THE LORD RULES CREATION FOR CHRIST'S GLORY

PSALM 103:15-19 • THE LORD RULES CREATION WITH FAITHFUL LOVE

MATTHEW 6:25-34 • THE LORD RULES CREATION WITH CARE FOR YOU



DOCTRINE VIDEO

(Videos available for purchase at gospelproject.com/students)

When we're talking providence, what we're talking about is the activity of God in the world. God has the right and power to accomplish His purposes, and He does through His acts of providence. Colossians says that Christ is above all (Col. 1:15-17). He is King, and He rules over everyone and everything. That's really good news, because that means we are not in charge. We have a hard enough time deciding what to order for lunch, much less ruling our lives. And unlike human kings, Jesus reigns with perfect love and goodness. He has always ruled that way, and He always will. Jesus said that we don't need to worry because He is in control and He cares for us. Just like He takes care of nature, He will take care of His children. Aren't we more valuable to Him than flowers? And yet He provides their every need. Jesus is at the center of creation—holding all things together, ruling over everything in perfect righteousness, and providing all that we need.

SUMMARY

- God's providence is based on His power and authority over the world.
- Jesus is greater than everything else in the universe.
- God always rules with goodness and love.
- You don't have to worry because God cares about your every need.

WATCH & DISCUSS

HOW DO YOU RESPOND WHEN THINGS FEEL OUT OF CONTROL? HOW CAN GOD'S PROVIDENCE GIVE YOU PEACE?

HOW CAN YOU LIVE LIKE JESUS IS REALLY THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE? WHAT WOULD NEED TO CHANGE THE MOST TO GET THERE?



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

The Lord rules over all creation.

1. THE LORD RULES CREATION FOR CHRIST'S GLORY

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-17

These verses contain some of the clearest teachings about Jesus' power and authority. While Jesus' life was a testament to the fact that He was more than just a man, these verses state plainly and decisively what the apostles believed about who Jesus is. Truly, there is no one who compares to Jesus.

WHAT DO THESE VERSES TEACH ABOUT JESUS' AUTHORITY?

Jesus is over all because He created all things. Much like the founder of a company has authority over the company, or an inventor has authority over the invention, so Christ, as the originator of creation, has authority over everything. His authority has no limit.

WHY DOES CREATION EXIST? OR MORE PERSONALLY, WHY DO WE EXIST?

The simple answer is "for him" (Col. 1:16). There may be more profound ways to explain the purposes of creation, or even of our lives, but none truer. All things—visible and invisible, personal and universal—exist for Jesus. That is why Paul could tell the Corinthians, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).



ENGAGE OPTION

With so many planes flying in and out of airports, it's incredible that we almost never hear about them crashing into each other on the runway. Even though the pilots are flying the planes, they aren't the ones with ultimate control of the runway. That power belongs to the air traffic controller.

There are a number of app games where you can simulate being an air traffic controller with an ever increasing number of planes trying to land. It's difficult to manage all the moving planes at once. Life has so many moving pieces. At times, we may feel like it is out of control. But luckily, God is overseeing it all. He is in control of the universe, directing history toward His purposes and plans.



COLOSSIANS 1:15-17

1:15-17 “This passage has received as much discussion in recent times as any section of the epistle. Scholars have concluded that vv. 15–20 contain a hymn to Christ. As such, it reflects the worship of the early church. The themes are far from abstract, removed affirmations about Jesus. They are living, vibrant, essential elements that found a significant place in regular worship.”¹³

1:16 “And all things were created for him. All that came into being exists for Christ—that is, it exists to display the greatness of Christ. Nothing—nothing!—in the universe exists for its own sake. Everything from the bottom of the oceans to the top of the mountains, from the smallest particle to the biggest star, from the most boring school subject to the most fascinating science, from the ugliest cockroach to the most beautiful human, from the greatest saint to the most wicked dictator—everything that exists, exists to make the greatness of Christ more fully known—including you.”¹⁴

1:16 “This means that Jesus is the goal of all creation. Everything exists to display His glory, and ultimately He will be glorified in His creation. Jesus is the central point of all of creation, and He rules over it.”¹⁵

1:17 “The Creator has not forgotten the creation. He daily maintains a balance in the universe.”¹³



ENGAGE OPTION

Everyone will struggle with worry and anxiety at some point. It can be a weekly, even daily, battle. Here’s an exercise to help us apply Jesus’ teachings about worry:

Give each student an index card and pen. Tell the students to think about the things they worry about and write down the ones they cannot control.

Now, read Matthew 6:25–27 together. We cannot improve or add to our lives by worrying. Worry does not accomplish anything good or healthy. Instead, we must trust in God’s providence. God is in control even when we are not. Encourage the students to take their cards home and pray every day this week over the things they have written.



2. THE LORD RULES CREATION WITH FAITHFUL LOVE

READ PSALM 103:15-19

WHY MUST WE REMEMBER THAT GOD RULES WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE?

It isn't enough to simply believe God reigns; for what if God rules in a way that is unwise or even evil? Our comfort isn't merely in God's providence, but that His providence is exercised in a way that is righteous and loving. He reigns in righteousness, rewarding good and punishing evil. He reigns in love, remembering His children and working for our good.

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE IN YOUR LIFE?

Reflecting on God's providence should inspire worship. One of the ways we can cultivate worship is by recounting God's faithfulness and love toward us. This can be seen in a number of ways if we have the eyes to see it—the gift of godly parents and leaders, the triumph of justice, healing from sickness and from painful experiences, His mercy to keep us from sin, His grace to forgive our failures. David wrote, “I will thank the Lord with all my heart; I will declare all your wondrous works” (Ps. 9:1). Our lives should declare the wondrous works of God. Don't hide what God has done; share it with the world.

3. THE LORD RULES CREATION WITH CARE FOR YOU

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

HOW MIGHT TRUST IN GOD'S CONTROL HELP FIGHT AGAINST WORRY?

We often worry about the things we cannot control—what your friends will think, who will win a ballgame, what the weather will be, if someone you love will get sick or hurt. But when we trust in God's providence, we will have peace. We may not be in control, but we know the One who is, and that He is good.

HOW DOES GOD'S CARE MOTIVATE KINGDOM LIVING?

After Jesus taught about God's care for His children, He said, “But seek first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). When you trust that God is holding you and that your life is in His hands, you are free to live for His kingdom. You aren't paralyzed with fear; instead, you are empowered to live in faith. You won't be preoccupied with the cares of this world, but with the priorities of heaven.



PSALM 103:15-19

103:15-17 “Humans are prone to presume that they are more durable and stable than they actually are...The Lord, whose care is as certain as His character, provides help for today and hope for tomorrow. Therefore, humans must place their hope in Him, not in themselves.”¹⁵

103:19 “The compassionate Father who keeps covenant with Israel is also the sovereign King who rules over all of the universe. Nothing lies outside the scope of the Lord’s rule, and He has established His throne securely against the threats of all potential rivals. Always and everywhere the Lord is reigning over all, so all humans are obliged to submit obediently to His authority over them.”¹⁵

MATTHEW 6:25-34

6:25-34 “‘Worry’ is the key word of this entire section, since it occurs six times (vv. 25, 27–28, 31, 34 [2x]). Christians must plan for the future, but they need not be anxious.”¹⁶

6:26 “If God lavishes such concern over the rest of His creation, how much more does He love us! Again, Jesus uses the characteristically Jewish type of reasoning—from the lesser to the greater. If the logic of His argument be granted, then worry results from a lack of genuine belief in God’s goodness and mercy.”¹⁶

6:33 “When priorities regarding treasures in heaven and on earth are right, God will provide for fundamental human needs.”¹⁶



BIG QUESTION

**IF JESUS IS THE
“FIRSTBORN OVER ALL
CREATION” (COL. 1:15),
DOES THAT MEAN HE IS
LESS THAN GOD?**

Jesus being the “firstborn” is not a statement about His origins, but about His rank. The following verse (Col. 1:16) clearly states that Jesus is Creator God, not creature. So what is Paul getting at by calling Jesus “firstborn?” Throughout the Scriptures, the firstborn is the one who has the rights to the inheritance and blessing. The firstborn has the right to assume the authority of his father. To apply this language to Jesus is to claim He has authority over creation and that all of creation is in Jesus’ inheritance—Jesus has the rights to everything. As Paul would go on to say, Jesus has “first place in everything” (Col. 1:18).



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is at the center of creation. All of creation exists by Him and for Him. The Son of God is the One who holds all of creation together.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

HOW CAN GOD'S PROVIDENCE GIVE US HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

Often, we look around in the present and are discouraged. We have unresolved problems in our relationships and issues in our personal lives. We see evil and injustice triumph in the world, and lies seem to outmaneuver the truth. But when you believe that God will have the final word—when you trust that He is directing things toward a wise and good conclusion—then you can have hope. When the people of Israel were exiled in Babylon, feeling worried and hopeless, God said, “For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the Lord’s declaration— “plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11).

HOW CAN OUR HEARTS TRUST GOD EVEN WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY GOD HAS ALLOWED SOMETHING TO HAPPEN?

God’s providence is puzzling at times. Why does He allow bad things to happen to His children or not permit some good things to succeed? How can we trust God in those situations? We look back at His track record. The Scriptures are full of stories where saints suffered and evil seemed to be winning, but God showed Himself faithful and good. We see that most clearly in the cross. Christ Himself endured evil and suffering that He did not deserve, but God raised and exalted Him. Paul wrote, “We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). Looking back at God’s track record and looking forward to His promises, we will grow in trust even when we do not understand.

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR JESUS TO BE “FIRST PLACE IN EVERYTHING” (COL. 1:18) IN OUR LIVES?

Jesus is “first place in everything” (Col. 1:18), whether we live like it or not. But we should want our lives to reflect what is true. We want to live in a way that corresponds with reality. Since Jesus is first, and we were made for Him, then we should seek to put Him first in all things. We ought to seek His kingdom first in our relationships, goals, priorities, and more. This is an ongoing effort. We naturally put ourselves first, and it is a lifelong pursuit to put Jesus first in all things.

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