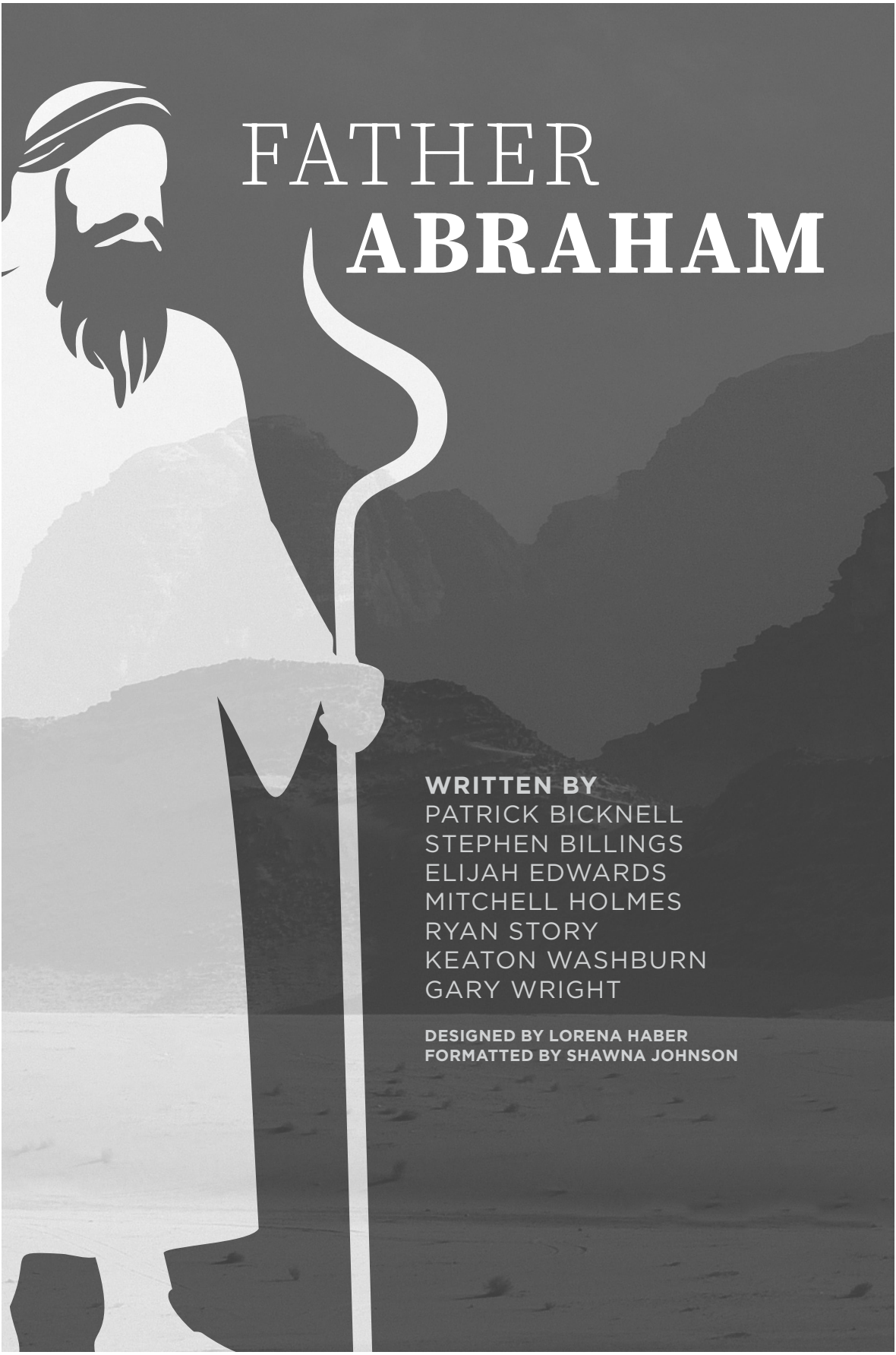


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Father Abraham

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THE RIVER CHURCH
REACH | GATHER | GROW



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PREFACE

Father Abraham had many sons
Many sons had father Abraham.
I am one of them and so are you.
So let's just praise the Lord.
Right Arm…

For all of those reading those lyrics, that might have just unlocked a melody you have long forgotten about; you are welcome. When I first began my ministry journey, I was able to serve in the children's ministry at a church not too far from The River Church. One of the first hurdles I had to jump was having to learn how to lead the Pre-K and Kindergarten classes in worship. While I was up for the challenge to learn motions and embark on the calisthenic work that is children's worship, the one area I realized quickly was my lack of understanding of the meaning behind the songs. I was not brought up in a Christian household and was new to my relationship with Christ, but the one thing I knew was that I loved working with children. When one of the pastors of this church approached me about serving, I was up for the journey. From that moment, I began learning songs like *"Father Abraham"* while simultaneously diving into the Bible for a deeper understanding of what these songs actually meant.

As I fast forward some 20 years, I am now married, have four children, and am blessed to be the Family Pastor at The River Church. One thing that has grown in me over the years, is a passion to see families grow in their relationship with Jesus.

In *"Father Abraham,"* we are going to look at the life of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is credited with being the "father of many nations." Children learn and sing about Father Abraham and how

he had many sons. This title and prestige were not something easily gained. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, encountered many struggles, battles, difficult decisions, and turmoil, as well as joys, triumphs, and celebrations on the path to becoming known as the “father of many nations.”

BEFORE WE BEGIN

We are excited to embark on a new adventure with this book! We have designed *"Father Abraham"* to be completed as an individual or as a family unit. While the target audience for these lessons is parents to read to their children, we are inviting the entire family of The River Church to join in this study. While the direct application of these lessons and devotions will be applied within families, all truth from the Bible reveals the truth about who God is and how He rescued and restored our relationship with Him.

In *"Father Abraham,"* every week will contain a Growth Community lesson and also a weekly memory verse. We believe in the importance of storing God's Word in our hearts. We challenge you to practice your memory verse daily. This can be done individually, as a family, or even as a Growth Community.

"Father Abraham" also contains daily devotions, broken up into an interactive study. Some of my favorite moments with my family are when we are sitting down eating and doing a dinner-time devotion. For five days of the week, each devotion will highlight a section of Scripture for you and your family can read, an explanation of the section, some questions you can answer, and a daily activity.

Family can sometimes be a sensitive subject. I praise God for the way He designed the Church. In the event that you may live alone, the beauty of the Church is we are all adopted by the blood of Christ. This could be a great opportunity for you to meet up with a person in your Growth Community and talk about the Bible every day, once a week, or whatever time frame fits your schedule.

Parent Pro Tip: I will openly admit that consistency is hard. I have

started my fair share of devotionals with my kids or in my personal life and have fallen short and not completed them. In the event that you miss a day, feel free to pick up the next day. All is not lost if you miss a day! Even if you and your family only accomplish three of the six days' worth of family devotions, you should have plenty of material to help in your walk toward and with the Lord.

Pastor Ryan Story
Family Pastor

A LETTER TO THE PARENTS OF A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

One of the happiest days of my life came a couple of years ago after I got back home from our student winter camp. It was my son's birthday, and we were having a party for him. I made sure all of the students got picked up, and then I headed over to my parents' house, where the party was going to be. Once I got there, we got ready to have food, and I asked my son if he wanted to pray. Right away, he bowed his head, closed his eyes, and began praying, "Dear Heavenly Father." I instantly had tears well up in my eyes as I saw my son pray to our good Heavenly Father. For those of you who do not know, my son has autism. He has a hard time learning things and understanding social cues, and I often wonder how much of what is taught in Kids Church or what I teach him about God, he actually grasps. It can be so hard for a parent of a child with special needs to know if the Lord is moving in their life. We can sometimes get discouraged for many different reasons, and I know I have from time to time, whether it is struggling with behavior, sleeping, eating, or any number of things. My goal for this letter to you (the parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, or just friend of someone who has a child with special needs) is to encourage you with what the truth of Scripture says about our amazing children.

We get an amazing truth about how God has created every single one of us in Psalm 149:13-14, ***"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are you works; my soul knows it very well."*** What I love about these verses, as they relate to my beautiful boy, is that the author does not put a stipulation on who is ***"fearfully and wonderfully made."*** It is not just reserved for people who do not have special needs. God is the One who creates everyone. He is an intentional and caring God.

These verses in Psalm 149 show us how God is over the formation of every child. Understanding that my child with special needs is formed by God just as much as any other child in the world was such an important reality for me to grasp and one that I hope you believe as well. Raising a kid with special needs is hard, attacks from the enemy can come from all over the place, and the lies can begin to swirl around you that God does not love your child, God is not going to move in their life, and that they are a mistake. However, Scripture gives us the truth we need, that every child, whether special needs or not, is intricately and graciously formed by God.

I want to leave you with this encouragement: when life begins to get tough, when you and your precious little one are having a hard day, and when you are in the midst of a struggle with them that you feel like will never end, look to our God. Look to Him and see His character. He is ever present, ever close, and always in control of your situation. Ask yourself these questions from Psalm 77:8-9, ***"Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"*** The resounding answer to all these questions is no. No, He has not ceased His steadfast love. No, His promises are not at an end. No, He has not forgotten to be gracious. No, He has not shut up His compassion. I know the road may seem dark sometimes, and you can feel alone while dealing with the struggles of raising a child with special needs, but we have a good God. He is able to provide us with everything we need to love our precious children and to teach them the love of our Savior.

Pastor Patrick Bicknell
Student Pastor

1

FAMILY DONE **DIFFERENTLY**

By Pastor Ryan Story

Memory Verse

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."
Hebrews 11:8

As a child, I remember watching shows with quite a variety of plots: *"Family Matters," "Full House," "Home Improvement," "Fresh Prince,"* and *"Step by Step."* Every one of those sitcoms, portrayed to me what family was. While I did not watch older shows, I remember watching shows such as *"Little House on the Prairie," "Leave it to Beaver," "The Munsters,"* and *"The Brady Bunch,"* and remember thinking how different the families were on those old-school shows to the newer sitcoms that I enjoyed watching.

1. What television sitcom or movie would you say most represents your family? What sitcom or movie would you say was the most different from your family?

_____

_____

_____

One of the realities that has always struck me as interesting was despite the fact that each show was very different, the value of family was there. Each show may have had a different target audience or portrayed the realities of a struggle in an era, yet the concept of a healthy family was there. Sadly for the church, these classic television shows can have more of an influence than the Word of God. We tend to look to Danny Tanner, Uncle Phil, or Carl Winslow as the model parent rather than those in the Bible. The hope is for Christian families to want to be different from the world. The person we are going to be studying is Abraham.

Genesis 11:27-32 records, ***"Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to***

go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

2. Why were families so important in the days of Terah?

_____

_____

_____

There are always tons of details that get overlooked when reading the Bible. When we read something familiar, our brains tend to put information into context out of order. At this moment, when we read about Abram and Sarai, we can have the tendency to jump to the part of the story where they are living for God. At the moment the Bible introduces Abram, he is spiritually bankrupt. His family is living in a pagan city. They are surrounded by worldly ideologies and practices. In the book of Joshua, Joshua tells of the covenant that was formed and describes Terah and Abram as men who ***"served other gods"*** (Joshua 24:2). To make matters worse, while Terah and Abram were making the track to Canaan, they experienced the loss of Lot's father, Haran. While it is not explicitly said, Abram's family settled in the city of Heran, an area that would eventually house the worship of the false moon god, Sin. This soon-to-be "Father of a Nation" begins his family journey as an idol-worshiping, pagan wanderer.

3. Why is the beginning of our story always important to remember?

_____

_____

_____

Abram's story starts with him settling in a place that was less than Jesus-honoring. While this is before Abram was called, so there is an element of us needing to withhold our judgment. The sad reality is that sometimes, those of us who are called redeemed believers of the work and person of Jesus, act like a "pre-called" Abraham, and settle into looking like the world in the way we "do family."

4. Where do you tend to “settle” with your family?

_____

_____

_____

Luckily for Abram (and us), God interrupts our settling.

Genesis 12:1-3 says, ***“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”***

5. What are the three areas God told Abraham to go from? What is the significance of these areas?

_____

_____

_____

6. Which of these is the most difficult to leave behind? Why are each of these so important to “do family differently”?

_____

_____

_____

Abram was presented with the greatest opportunity any man has ever had. He was presented with the promise that the God of the universe would make a great nation out of his line. Abram’s family would literally be a blessing to the world. When presented with the overwhelming wonder of this call from God, only a fool would say “no.” The next nine words are the beginning of what made family different for Abram and what makes family different for us.

Genesis 12:4 says, ***“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him…”***

7. Why is Abraham's obedience to God so crucial to seeing family done differently? What does that mean for us and our families?

_____
_____
_____

8. What did Abram have to possess in order to be obedient?

_____
_____
_____

Hebrews 11:8-19 says, ***"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."***

9. Why is faith in God so essential to everything?

_____
_____
_____

10. Why is it easier to do what we want ("settle") than it is to obey ("went")?

_____
_____
_____

This month, if family is going to be done differently, we have to look to Abram as an example. Abram was just like all of us. He was sinful, worshiped things over God, and lived in a world that idolized sin. Abram did what we have all done at some point; we settled and lived like the world. However, God called Abram out of a dark, purposeless place. If it is important to know where we came from,

why is it important to know what God can bless us with when we live for him?

11. How can you begin to do family differently?

_____

_____

_____

NOTES

FAMILY ESTABLISHED BY FAITH

DEVOTION 1 - STEPHEN BILLINGS

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land." Genesis 12:1-6 (NIV)

In Genesis chapter 12, God gives clear instructions to Abraham to move. God says, ***"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."*** God had special plans for Abraham and his family. Those plans began with Abraham making a choice. He had to decide whether he was going to obey God when God told him to move. Was he going to trust that God had his best interest in mind?

Faith is having complete trust in someone or something. Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by being obedient. Abraham moved to Harran because of his faith in God.

God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation, give him a great name, and provide blessings for his family. God promised all this to Abraham because He had a special plan for His one and only Son to come from the line of Abraham.

If God told you to move to another country, state, or city, would you do it?

Why is it hard to move from one place to another?

What blessings has God given you and your family?

Family Prayer: *God, thank You for all the blessings You have given our family. I pray that we can be obedient to You just as Abraham was obedient. In Your name, Amen.*

A FAMILY THAT RESOLVES CONFLICT

DEVOTION 2 - STEPHEN BILLINGS

Genesis 13:1-10 records, ***"So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.' And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)"***

Family road trips can be so fun. As a child, I have so many fun memories of driving for over ten hours to visit family. In the first hour or two, you settle in and get comfy. By hour four or five, you begin to get antsy because you simply want to arrive at your destination. If you are traveling with children, you begin to hear crying or, "Are we

there yet?" (over and over again). Family road trips truly become a joy (sarcasm) when a disagreement arises. You can argue, but there is nowhere to go. You are stuck in the same space with whomever you are arguing with and nowhere to go.

In Genesis chapter 13, Abraham was traveling with his family including his nephew, Lot. As their family traveled, a disagreement began to arise between those providing care for both of their flocks. Both Abraham and Lot had many possessions and large flocks. Because of this, there was not enough space for both Abraham and Lot's flocks to peacefully be together.

As the conflict arose, Abraham and Lot had a choice to make. Would they allow a family feud to begin, or would they be gracious to one another? Abraham chose to be gracious. Genesis 13:8-9 shares that Abraham recognized the value of his relationship with his nephew and wanted to do whatever he could to preserve this relationship. So, Abraham asked Lot to choose a section of land where he would prefer to live with his family and flock.

When conflict arises, we have a choice. Do we choose to show grace, or do we start a family feud? Abraham and Lot's conflict and resolution is a great example for us to follow. When conflict arises, lead with grace. This is what God did when sin entered the world. God sent His one and only Son as an act of grace, providing a way for us to go to Heaven.

When you face conflict, how do you naturally react?

Is it easy for you to show grace to those in your family? Why or why not?

Spend time as a family talking about when you had to resolve a family conflict. Are you happy with how things were resolved? What would you do differently after today's devotional?

Family Activity: Read John 3:16 out loud together.

Family Prayer: *God, thank You for showing us grace by sending Your son, Jesus, to die on the cross and rise again. Please help our family show grace to one another just like Abraham showed Lot grace.*

FAITH FUELS A FAMILY TO OBEY GOD

DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." Hebrews 11:8-10

When we surrender our lives to the Lord, the prospect of Him calling us to go to a place we are unfamiliar with can be scary. That fear gets amplified when you start to add a family into the mix. When my wife and I got married, we had discussions where we would ask each other, "If God calls us to _____, how would you feel?" The answer was always something like, "I would go, but I would be scared."

I am sure that when Abram was told by God to take his family and live in a faraway country, he had similar feelings. The Bible mentions how Abram led his family to obey where the Lord was calling them to go. In Hebrews chapter 11, two massive words are given that show us how we can have the same obedience as Abram did in Genesis chapters 11 and 12. Those words are, ***"By faith."*** Following the Lord can be scary at times, especially if that means moving to a place you are unfamiliar with. Making new friends, being in a new place, and all the unknown that comes with taking a leap of faith can be hard. However, if we want to do family differently, it is something we have to do. The only way we, as a family, can truly surrender

everything to the Lord is through having faith in Him and trusting that He has an amazing plan for our family.

If God calls your family to move to a new town, how would you all feel?

How can we grow our faith as a family? What practices can help us with that?

What do you think would be the hardest part of doing what Abram did with his family?

Do you think you can still obey God even if you may not necessarily "like" where it takes your family?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving our family. I pray that as we seek to obey whatever You have for us, that we would grow our faith in You. We want to be ready to do Your will. Lord, help us to discern where You are calling our family and what You are calling us to. Help us to be a light to our world. We love You, and we pray this all in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*

DIFFERENT

DEVOTION 4 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"
Genesis 12:1-3

No one likes being different, and yet, that is exactly what God told Abram to be. God told Abram to leave his country, kindred, and father's house to go to where God wanted him. God desired Abram to have faith, and because Abram had faith, that made him different from those in his country, those he was close to, and even those who were his family. Since Abram was the first person of the blessing to bless all nations, Abram would have been very different from everyone. When people live for God, they should act differently. Sometimes, we try so hard not to be different that we forget that God uses that difference to show people Himself.

Eventually, the blessing of all the earth would be because Jesus died on the cross and rose again three days later. Every person who puts their faith in Him will look different from their country, those they are friends with, and those who are even in their family. The amazing thing is that the faith that makes us different is the difference God uses to show people who do not know Him how He can change a person. Being different is not so bad.

How was Abram different from other people?

How did Abram's difference become a blessing for all of mankind?

How do you feel about being different?

Why is it good to be different for Jesus?

How can your family's difference become a blessing for another family?

Family Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank You for calling us out of darkness into knowing that You love us, died for us, and gave us eternal life. We praise You for the work of Your Son. Thank You Jesus for calling us to know You, live for You, and tell others about You. Thank You Lord for making us different from the world. Lord, please use our faith in You to be a blessing to another person. We love You, Jesus. In Your name we pray, Amen.*

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

DEVOTION 5 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

"And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.'" Joshua 24:2

When we read about Abraham, we often forget that he started his life far from God. Before God called Abram, Abram lived in a place where no one worshiped God. That means not Abram's dad, not his wife, not his brother, not even his neighbors. Everyone lived a life that was full of sin and full of doing whatever they wanted. Abram was a man who was far from God and lived in a way that was not how God wants anyone to live. However, God is so amazing that He called Abram to know Him. God told Abram to have faith in His plan, and Abram did! One of the most important truths anyone can know in the Bible is that if we know God, we can change. God does an amazing thing when people put their faith in the truth that Jesus died for their sins, and confess that Jesus rose again three days after dying on the cross. When we put our faith in Jesus, just like Abraham, God changes us. God comes to live in the hearts of those who believe, and He helps us make the choices to serve and live for Him.

How can a person's heart be changed?

How was Abraham's heart changed?

Why is faith so important to bring a change in our hearts?

Can we change if our hearts are not willing?

How did God change our family?

Family Prayer: *Dear Jesus, Thank You for Your love. Lord, we ask that our love for You changes us from the inside out. Lord, please help us have the faith to trust You. Lord, forgive us when we wander away from You. Lord, please keep us close to You. Jesus, we praise You for allowing our family to know that change is possible when we put our trust and faith in You and Your work on the cross. We love You, Jesus. Amen.*

A LETTER TO PARENTS

DEVOTION 6 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

Dear Parents,

From one parent who is just trying to figure things out to what I assume is another parent just trying to figure things out, let us talk about doing family differently. I want you to know, working to do family differently sure sounds easier than it often is to live out. In a day and age with constant pressure in every area of how we parent and raise our kids, being different can be a challenge. I feel that. Parenting is not for the faint of heart!

Maybe you have been there. You feel bombarded with questions from friends or family regarding your choice of schooling, sports, clothing, or device usage; that list could just go on and on. Everyone wants to have a say; everyone wants their voice to be heard. I feel that, too.

I wish I could sit here, and tell you a perfect formula for how to parent. It would be just perfect if I could give you a tried and true step-by-step plan on how to parent your kids so they grow up to not only believe in Jesus; but also to love and serve Him, as well as be successful, dependable, and wonderful contributors to society? The unfortunate reality is that I do not hold that information, though I would push you to the One who does. God has given us His words in Scripture to lead and guide us. Isaiah 55:8 reminds us, ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."*** When we do not spend time in God's Word, we can start to get confused that maybe our thoughts are actually His thoughts, though that often is not true.

As a parent, trusting in God's leading is the greatest understanding of doing family differently that we can hold to. If we want to do family differently, then we have to actually do something different. It is not enough to wish or hope things could be different; we have to actually do something different. I would encourage you to start with reading and talking about Scripture with your kids (no matter their age!). Have discussions at the dinner table, in the car, during the last few minutes before bed, and whatever works for your family.

We also have to recognize that the differences that God calls one family to might look different from the differences of another family. Only by being in God's Word and spending time in prayer with Him can we follow in His leading. Psalm 119:105 writes, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** We have to learn to allow the Word of God to light our way, but that only comes from actually spending time with Him. It needs to be done individually and as a family.

My encouragement to you is to keep trying. Keep working at it. If you missed a day of reading Scripture together or talking over God's Word, you do not have to miss another. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, ***"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*** Seek the difference that God has for your family.

Sincerely yours,
A parent trying to do family differently

2

INTENTION VERSUS OUTCOME

By Pastor Keaton Washburn

Memory Verse

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."
Genesis 12:2

In April of 2023, my wife, Haleigh, and I bought our first home. Up to that date, the largest purchase of my life was a used vehicle. The purchase of our home trumped the purchase of a vehicle by many thousands of dollars. The pressure that Haleigh and I felt when signing the documents for the title company was unlike anything I had ever signed before. The details of our mortgage were dizzying. Truthfully, I did not fully understand everything that I signed, but I trusted that our realtor had led us correctly. In signing our mortgage, we had committed to paying a large sum of money every month for the next couple of decades of our lives. There was a mix of nerves and excitement for us that day.

1. Share a contract that you have had to sign and some of the terms that you remember signing. What were your emotions toward the contract? Any nerves? What was at stake in signing the contract?

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Genesis 15:1-6 says, ***"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."***

These verses are often referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant. One thing to note here is that this is not a *contract* between Abram

(whose name has not yet been changed to Abraham) and the Lord. Rather, it is a *covenant*.

2. What are the differences between a contract and a covenant?

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3. What other covenants do we see God make throughout Scripture?

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Read Genesis 15:6 again.

Abram believed the Lord. Abraham's faith was in the Lord and the commitment that the Lord had made to him. Because of this, God counted Abram's faith as righteousness. Three times in the New Testament, the writers recount this truth of Abraham's faith being counted as righteousness before the Lord (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23). Simply put, because Abram put his faith in God, Abram was able to have a right standing with God.

4. How were people saved before the life, death, and resurrection of Christ?

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Romans 4:20-25, speaking of Abraham, tells us, ***"No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised***

from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

5. What similarities are there between Old Testament believers and Christians today? How are each saved?

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As we look back at the Messiah (Christ) today, Old Testament believers looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah. They had to have faith that the Lord would be faithful to His promises. Today, we need faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9).

In a turn of events, the next chapter shows Abram's wife, Sarai's, unbelief in the promises of the Lord.

Genesis 16:1-6 says, ***"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!' But Abram said to Sarai, 'Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her."***

Through a vision, the Lord made a covenant to Abram. Abram believed it but his wife, Sarai, was not as quick to put her faith in the word of the Lord.

Instead of trusting that the Lord would be true to His promise that they would have their own son and their heirs would ***"number the stars,"*** Abram and Sarai chose to make God's promise happen their own way in their timing. Whether it was their impatience, their shallow belief, or their lack of faith, Abram and Sarai chose to make their own path when God told them to wait and trust Him.

6. Why is it tempting to make things happen instead of waiting on the Lord's timing? What are some ways that this could backfire on someone?

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The actions of Sarai in giving her servant Hagar to Abram were normal in that culture. This was not wrong culturally, but just because is acceptable to the world does not mean it is acceptable in the eyes of God. Maybe Sarai's intentions were good, but the result of their actions showed a lack of faith.

7. What do you think of the saying, "It is the thought that counts"? Is it true?

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8. Does "the thought count" in the mind of the Lord? When or when not?

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One of the first results of Sarai giving Hagar to Abram was that Hagar turned on Sarai once she became pregnant; maybe she was gloating or holding it over Sarai. The outcome that Sarai had hoped for was not what happened. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar, and Hagar ultimately fled. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, doubting God's words, Abram and Sarai try to make things happen in their timing and their way.

God had made a covenant with Abram. Because the Lord is the one holding that covenant, God came through. Even when Sarai tried to make their own path, the Lord still brought them to their intended destination in Genesis chapter 21 with the birth of their son, Isaac. Ultimately, God was fulfilling His covenant that He made to Abram in Genesis chapters 12 and 15.

9. Why is trusting in God's plan so difficult?

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10. As a church, what are some ways we can encourage each other to have faith in the plans of God?

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NOTES

DANGERS OF FOLLOWING YOUR OWN HEART

DEVOTION 1 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

Growing up, I absolutely loved *"Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."* (Ask the kids who their favorite Ninja Turtle is, as if they know them.) The Turtles were so cool, and I remember in one of the movies, there was a song in the movie that had the lyric, "Follow your heart." That is a good message, right?

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Follow your heart"? If so, where have you heard it from?

That seems like a good message. Our heart is good, right? Is it not where our love comes from?

Read Jeremiah 17:9-10.

What does this passage say about our hearts?

Jeremiah is saying our hearts are ***"deceitful"*** and ***"sick!"***

Would you follow someone who is lying to you? Why or why not?

In Genesis chapter 16, Sarai and Abram wanted a child so badly that they put having a child ahead of what God had planned for them. Their hearts were focused on that instead of God and they messed up because of it. Just like them, we can think our heart knows what is best for us when only God truly knows what is best for us.

Read Isaiah 48:17: ***"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.'"***

What are some hard things you face in life?

How can your heart deceive you in those situations?

Why is God's way better than our heart's way?

Family Prayer: *Pray with your family. Search your heart and give it all to God. He knows what is best for you.*

DANGERS OF FOLLOWING YOUR OWN PATH
DEVOTION 2 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was thirteen years old, my family moved to a new house. I was further away from my best friend, and I still wanted to see him. So, one day, I got on my bike and had to choose between two paths to get there. The one path that I knew would take me directly to his house or the other path, which was a way I thought would be a shortcut. I took the shortcut, and it took me getting chased by a dog, falling in a ditch, and stopping at a fallen bridge, which made me realize that it was the wrong way. I never made it to my friend's house, and I had to go back home.

Have you ever gotten lost trying to go your own way?

How do you feel when you get lost?

Read Genesis 15:1-6.

What did God promise Abram?

What was God's plan in these verses?

Abram wanted to have an heir, a son. God promised Abram a son. Even though the Lord of all the universe promised Abram and Sarai, they still felt they were too old to have kids. In Genesis chapter 16, Sarai and Abram took their own way of having a son and did not follow the path that God had planned. This caused many issues because they were not trusting in God's path and instead went on their own route to disaster.

Why is it dangerous to go your own way and not God's?

Read Proverbs 3:5-6: ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."***

According to these verses, why is God's path the right way?

Family Prayer: *Pray with your family and ask God to help you trust in His ways and His path for you and your family. Seek Him rather than trying to go your own way and getting lost or in trouble.*

THE BEAUTY OF A COVENANT

DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

Read Genesis 9:11-17.

Like God making a covenant with Abram in Genesis chapter 12 and chapter 15, God also made other covenants. After the great flood, God promised Noah and all people of all time that He would never again flood the whole earth. The amazing truth about a covenant is that it is not like a contract where if one person messes up, then the whole deal is over. A covenant is a promise given by someone independent of the other person's actions. So, no matter what we do, because God gave us this covenant, He will never break it! Not only did God make this covenant, but He also gave a sign of this covenant to serve as a reminder of His promise: the rainbow.

What do you think it would have been like to be on the ark with Noah and his family, seeing God flood the whole earth?

When was the last time you saw a rainbow? What did the rainbow come after?

Like God's covenant with Noah and all mankind, there is another promise of God in Hebrews 13:5-6, ***"For he [God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"*** God is in complete control. He has kept every promise, and He will continue to keep His promises because that is who He is!

Complete the family activity on the following page.

Family Activity: Draw a picture of Noah and his family. Put the ark in the background with a beautiful rainbow. It is a reminder of God's covenant and promise, both to Noah and to Christians today.

FLASHLIGHTS

DEVOTION 4 - PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

I must admit, I am a little bit obsessed with flashlights. For multiple years in a row, I asked for flashlights for my birthday, and each year, I got them. My house is filled with those flashlights! There is one in the kitchen, the bedroom, the basement, in each of my camping bins, and one in each of our cars. I am a bit obsessed, but I do not want to be left in the dark if the power goes out!

Do you have a flashlight ready around your house? If so, where do you keep it? Have you had to use it?

Like the need for flashlights, the Bible tells us of the importance of light when walking in the dark.

Read Psalm 119:105, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."***

What is God's Word described as? How do we find God's words?

How does God's Word act as a light for us?

When we try to go through life without a light, we end up fumbling and stumbling over things as if we were trying to walk through our house in the dark. We bump into things, take wrong turns, and we might even knock some things over. To help us see clearly, God has shown us how to live by giving us the Bible. Now, we have to read it, study it, and memorize it so that His Word can guide us!

Family Activity:
As a family, collect the following supplies:

- A box that you can cut some holes into
- Scissors (Be safe)
- A flashlight
- A Bible

Step 1. Cut two holes in a box with your scissors. One hole is to look through and the other is for a flashlight to shine through.

Step 2. Put the Bible in the center of the box and turn the lights off. Take turns trying to see the Bible in the dark box. Then, shine the flashlight in the box on the Bible.

Step 3. Discuss as a family: Was it easier to see the Bible with the light on or off?

Just as the flashlight helps us see the Bible, God's Word helps us understand and see the path that God has for us.

NEW HEART

DEVOTION 5 - PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

What is the oldest thing you can think of? Is it a person or a place? How old is the item?

If you could have anything new, what would it be? Would it be a new toy, bike, or friend?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."***

This verse shows us the truth that followers of Jesus change when they give their lives to Him. A follower of Christ goes from being someone who cannot trust their heart to someone whose heart knows how to trust God. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church and has one of the craziest stories of this type of heart change. Acts chapter 9 tells us that before Paul became a Christian, his name was Saul, and he was out to kill Christians. He hated the message of Jesus and Jesus' followers. He was not a very kind man. Then, while Paul was on his way to find and kill Christians, God shined a light on him from the sky and spoke to him. Paul was blinded and led to a follower of Jesus named Ananias, who preached the Gospel to him. Paul was saved and baptized. He then became a preacher and church planter and wrote almost half of the New Testament. Talk about a heart change! Like Paul, we also get a new heart when we choose to follow Jesus as our Lord.

What are some things that your heart desires? Do those things honor God?

Have you turned from your sin and chosen to follow Jesus as the Lord of your life? If so, how has your heart changed? (Mom or Dad, this is a great opportunity for you to share your testimony!)

Family Prayer: *Pray as a family that God would give each of you the desires of His heart. Also, pray that you would seek after the things that God is after like love, joy, and justice.*

A LETTER TO PARENTS

DEVOTION 6 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

Dear Parent,

I hope that this letter finds you well! Last time I left you, I shared Proverbs 3:5-6, ***"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*** This verse is so well known, but at the same time, hard to fully grasp and understand. In the realm of parenting and having to make choices both big and small that impact my family, the path does not always feel straight.

This week, we have taken into consideration the destination versus the path. When it comes to thinking about the destination and the path, it is important to identify what these words mean within our families and how they apply to them. There is a possibility you do not use the word destination, but you could have goals, spoken or unspoken, for your family. These are the desires where you hope to see your kids or family end up or what you hope they can accomplish in life. The path is really any means or ways your family goes about accomplishing those goals or desires, or trying to reach that destination.

Parent, I hope you realize the importance of focusing on both the destination and the path with your family. The destination should be more than just hoping your kids or family members will end up in Heaven. Matthew 22:37-39 says, ***"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your***

neighbor as yourself.'" These verses call us to more than just a head knowledge of who God is, but a call to loving Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Out of this, we see a love for our neighbors. When we have this depth of love, it is not going to be something we just have, but it becomes something we show and live out.

If that is the destination we aim for, we have to think about how we help get our families there. If we choose to select paths for our families, and kids specifically, that are minimally filled with Jesus and God's Word, it does not seem reasonable to think that their destination will suddenly be filled with Jesus and God's Word. Now, please hear me out. I am not claiming that your child must attend every church event or that they are not saved. I am asking you to consider the quality and quantity of biblical conversations, reading the Word, prayer, and worship that your child is engaged in.

If I were to encourage one thing, it would be to help your family, and especially your children, develop deep roots in their relationship with God. Everything that is on your family path is worth evaluating and taking into consideration because it will undoubtedly impact your family's destination. Trust in the Lord, turn to Him, and rely on His calling and leading for your family. Turn this into daily conversations in your home. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 writes, ***"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."***

Until next time,
A fellow parent finding their way on the path

3

PROTECTION & PREPAREDNESS

By Pastor Ryan Story

Memory Verse

"And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' - and he was called a friend of God."

James 2:23

Recently, my wife and I took our children to a waterpark resort for a family trip. Notice, I said trip, not a vacation. Vacations are restful and void of children. Trips involve children, waterparks, and no rest. Trips are not restful for parents. Despite that, all parents love trips with their kids. We were having a great time, then it happened. I was walking with my two older sons to one of the waterslides, and I watched a little girl run, slip, and fall on her back. Praise God she was uninjured and sprung right back up. However, this little girl's father (we will call him "Joe Every-parent") was very frustrated. I could hear Joe tell his daughter something I have, in fact, said to my own kids, "Haven't I told you, no running in a waterpark; you can slip and hurt yourself!" I walked by Joe, and we exchanged the "I get you man" glance. Joe Every-parent's heart may not have been 100% glorifying God at the moment, but there was something very familiar with his response. Every parent ought to want to protect their children, and every parent should want to prepare their child. These are not just good societal rules. A parental role that protects and prepares your children is biblical.

Matthew 18:6 warns, ***"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."***

We should never want anything to get in between anyone and a saving relationship with Jesus, especially our own children.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 commands, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."***

Teaching and preparing our children to know Jesus' love, to love Jesus, to live for Jesus, and, best yet, to see our children teach the Gospel to their children is a daunting task. Literally, it causes chills.

We should desire to prepare our children to know and walk with the Lord and to walk in faith.

1. On a scale of 0 - 10, with 0 being not at all, and 10 being totally:
   How prepared by your parents do you feel? _____
   How protected by your parents do you feel? _____
   If applicable, how are you with your grandchildren? _____

The story of Abraham and Isaac is one that has been preached, taught, and placed on felt boards for thousands of years. For most of us, when we think of the interesting dynamic between Abraham and Isaac, our brains go to the moment in Genesis chapter 22 when God calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar on Mount Moriah. The truths that are found in Genesis chapter 22 are ones that every parent needs to heed and ones I wish I had known early in my parenting journey.

PROTECT

Genesis 22:1-3 says, ***"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."***

2. Why does God test us? What is the difference between a test and a temptation?

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3. How does God describe Isaac to Abraham? Why does this description make this test so hard for Abraham?

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In this moment, God revealed an idol in Abraham's life. The very son God gave to Abraham and Sarah became an object that distanced Abraham from God. God knew Abraham's faith, and God knew Abraham's heart. A part of this test was to see if Abraham trusted God completely. Sadly, sometimes, the most meaningful blessings God gives us in life become the areas in which we least trust God.

Every time I read this chapter, this request from God causes a massive struggle with its insanity. As parents, are we not called to protect our children from everything? It can range from skinned knees to horrible diseases that can be contracted if our child drinks out of the water hose. Were we not tasked with the never-ceasing worry of the "what if" scenarios?

At this moment, God is asking a parent to do something insane. God is asking Abraham to trust Him. At this moment, God is asking a father to realize that his love for his child is not the best way to protect the youth. The greatest protection a child will ever have is when their parent is fully obedient to God. Amazingly, at this moment, Abraham made the resolution to trust God, no matter what.

4. When is it hardest to trust God in your life?

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5. How does obedience to the Lord best help us receive the protection our parents gave/give us?

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6. What practical ways can you show your relationship with Jesus in how you trust in His protection?

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PREPARE

Genesis 22:4-6 says, ***"On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.' And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together."***

7. If you were Abraham, how would you be feeling at this point of God's test?

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By the time this book is published, my oldest son will be nine. My youngest will be three. There will be an eight-year-old and a six-year-old in the middle. (Cue *"Cat's in the Cradle."*) There are so many times I know I have missed to prepare my children for life because I wanted to protect them. There have been so many learning opportunities I have taken away from them because, in my impatience, I could not watch them struggle. I would rather protect my kids from any difficulty. I would rather wrap them in bubble wrap and not let them make any choices that could hurt them. This is tricky to navigate, but as believers, we have to protect our children from a real enemy, and we also have to prepare them for the fight that is at hand. We have to prepare our children to have faith in Jesus.

8. Do you feel like overprotection might have caused you to not be prepared for certain things in life?

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Abraham did a lot of things wrong. Sin complicated a lot of his life. However, one truth God seemed to put on his heart was to prepare and protect Isaac by keeping his faith in God.

Hebrews 11:17-19 says, ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."***

9. What is the best advice you were given to help you be prepared for life?

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The best way to protect and prepare the next generation to live for the Lord is to model for them what faith looks like. Your kids were given to you by a sovereign King. He did not bless you with children so you could stress all day or create a list of life lessons. God gave you children so you can love them as He loves you. God gave you children so you could be a minister of reconciliation, an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

We live in a broken, fallen world. We live in a world that needs to teach children how to grow up. The only way to do both is to ensure that they have a genuine relationship with Jesus. The best way for that to be fostered is them to see yours.

Deepak Reju said, “While only God can save children, God uses parents who raise their children ***‘in the training and instruction of the Lord’*** (Ephesians 6:4) as a means to pass truth on to the next generation.”

10. How can we get better at preparing the next generation or at following our parents as they try to protect and prepare us for life?

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NOTES

PROTECT FROM PUTTING THEMSELVES FIRST

DEVOTION 1 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him." Genesis 22:1-3

How could Abraham put himself first here?

How could Isaac put himself first here?

Abraham was told by God to sacrifice his own son. It was the son that was promised to him. It was the one from whom God would later promise to multiply His people. Abraham followed through with this command. He could have easily told God that he was not going to do it, put himself and his own wishes for his son first. Yet, he put God first because he trusted God. Isaac was able to see this trust from his father and see the example of putting God first above himself. In turn, we must protect our kids and ourselves from putting our way first over God. God's ways are better than our own, even when it seems confusing. We must trust God because He created us, loves us, and sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sins. It is important that we protect kids from putting themselves first and teach them that Jesus put God over Himself and obediently died on the cross for our sins. In turn, this saved all of us.

We are going to play a question game. Adults you will ask a question to your kids and kids you will ask questions to your parents.

Parent question for kids: Do you like to be first in line? (Bus stop, lunch line, line leader, recess, or store)

Kid question for parents: Do you like to be first in line? (Getting a promotion at work, line at the Secretary of State, or grocery store)

We all like to be first. No matter if we are an adult or a kid. Putting ourselves first is usually what is at the top of our mind when going through our day.

Parent question for kids: Why do you like to be first in line?

Kid question for parents: Why do you like to be first?

Question for everyone: How can you, starting today, put God's ways before yourself and protect your family from putting ourselves first?

PREPARE FOR OBEDIENCE

DEVOTION 2 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

Before the devotion: Adults, set out any type of sweet (marshmallow, candy, or chocolate) and ask the kids not to eat it and for them to trust you that they should not eat the sweet. Leave the room for a few minutes.

Return to the room with another sweet.

If your child has eaten the sweet, let them know that you had a second one for them, but since they did not trust you, you cannot reward them with the sweet. If your child did not eat the sweet give them the second sweet as a reward for trusting you.

Adults ask kids: What made it hard not to eat the sweet? Why did you eat the sweets, or why did you choose not to eat the sweets?

Kids ask adults: Why did you not tell me that I would get a second sweet if I did not eat the first ones?

It is hard to obey sometimes. We want what we want, and most of the time, the things we want are now. From the very first people, Adam and Eve, to now, we have all been disobeying God because we want what we do not have.

Read Genesis 22:1-3, ***"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham***

rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

How is Abraham being obedient to God?

How is Isaac being obedient to his father?

Isaac witnessed his father, Abraham, being obedient to God. In turn Isaac was being obedient to his father and also being obedient to God. Isaac trusted his father because Abraham trusted God. Both were obedient to Him.

Why is it sweeter to be obedient than disobedient?

PREPARE TO COMPLETE THE TASK

DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

Read Genesis 22:8-9: ***"Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood."***

In our last devotional, we read how important it is for us to trust in God's provision. However, it does not end there. Abraham had faith that God would provide, as we saw in our last passage in Hebrews and here in Genesis. Even though he had faith that God would provide, Abraham knew it was not the end of the process; he still had to prepare to complete the task that God had commanded him. He did not reach the offering spot and sit and wait for God to send a sacrifice. Abraham went forward with building an altar for a burnt offering, and then he even laid his son on top of that altar. Abraham knew that trust was not enough. Sometimes, we have to put in the effort to prepare for God to do something incredible. In this story, Abraham fully trusted that if needed, God could raise Isaac from the dead, so Abraham prepared to complete the task and allowed God to move.

In our lives, having faith in God's ability to take care of us is not the end of the process. We have to prepare to do whatever task He has given us and trust Him to move in the midst of it. I heard it said once that two farmers trusted God to water their fields, but only one farmer went out and plowed his field and prepared for the rain to come. Which one of those two farmers do you think trusted

God? Our reliance and trust in God is shown in our willingness and preparation to complete the task.

What does it mean when someone says, “Actions speak louder than words”?

If you say something, but your actions are completely different, what does that demonstrate?

Is trust in God enough? Can we just relax and wait on God to provide us everything we could ever need?

Why do you think God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son? What was God testing in Abraham?

What are some ways that you can prepare yourself to trust in God when He asks you to?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, help us to trust You in everything. Help us to trust You so much that our actions reflect our faith in Your provision. Help us to boldly prepare to complete the task when You ask us to trust You. Thank You God for the ways that You provide for us and use us to be a part of Your Kingdom. Thank You for using our hardships to bring glory to You. In the name of Your Son, Jesus, Amen.*

PREPARE TO TRUST IN GOD'S PROVISION

DEVOTION 4 - PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

Read Hebrews 11:17-19: ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead."***

In this passage, we see Abraham do something that seems completely crazy. God had made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. God had promised to make this happen specifically through Isaac. After making that promise, God then commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. The completely crazy thing is that Abraham was ready to do it! Abraham completely trusted in God's provision. That means that he trusted that God would provide even if it made no sense, even if it was completely impossible and crazy! Abraham knew that our God in Heaven was working things out for good, so he believed God's promise to use Isaac to make a great nation. He believed that promise so strongly that he was even willing to sacrifice Isaac. He knew if it came down to it, God could even raise Isaac from the dead to still fulfill His promise.

In our lives, there will come times when we have to trust God even when it seems like there is no way out. We must trust and obey God even when it makes no sense. God loves and provides for His children.

What does it mean to trust someone?

Has anyone in your life ever made you not want to trust them?

How much can you trust in God?

Abraham knew God's promises and trusted them. Do you know what God has promised in your life?

If your answer to the last question was "no," do you know what you can do to find out what God has promised?

What can you as a family do to study God's Word and then rest in His promises found within His Word?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us and being a good Father that takes care of His children. Help us to draw near to You in prayer and in study of Your Word. Help us to have peace in hardship. Help us to trust You like Abraham trusted You even when things seem impossible. Thank You for the ways that You have already provided for us and the ways that You will continue to provide for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

"WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER"

DEVOTION 5 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.' And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together." Genesis 22:1-6

Sometimes, God calls us to do things that we would never think to do, but we have to trust that God always has a plan. In this moment, God was testing Abraham's faith by seeing if his faith would produce obedience. While Abraham's faith is the focus of this moment recorded in God's Word, an amazing truth is revealed. The amazing thing that Abraham does as a father is that he and his son, Isaac, ***"went both of them together."*** Abraham was tested by God, and he did not walk the path alone. While Isaac was the focal point of God's test, Abraham still brought his son with him and did not bring the other young men.

Oftentimes we try to overly protect our children by not modeling ***"both of them together"*** in our walk with Jesus. We do not talk to our children about the difficulties and joys of being obedient to God. Sadly, we as parents try to prepare our children by not forgetting ***"both of them together."*** We leave our children to figure out life all alone.

Parents, until your child is married, they are with you to teach them about Jesus. Be like Abraham and walk ***"both of them together."***

Children, your parents have a task that God gave them, and that is to teach you to love Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is not an annoyance to have a parent who goes ***"both of them together."*** It is a blessing.

As a family, how can everyone be more united to a ***"went both of them together"*** life?

Should struggles ever be private in a family? Why or why not?

How can you invite someone in to ***"both of them together"*** in a struggle you have today?

Family Prayer: *Dear Jesus, help our hearts be humble to walk this life united because of our faith in You. God, please allow us to bear one another's burdens. Allow us to be a family that prays for each other, loves each other, serves each other, and worships Your Father God together. Lord, we ask You to keep our family united in wanting to worship You. We love You, Jesus, and we praise You for loving us first. In Your beautiful name, Amen.*

A LETTER TO PARENTS

DEVOTION 6 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

Dear Parent,

As we have studied and learned about Father Abraham, I hope you have seen the importance of both the protection and prepared actions we must take. There is the chance that you lean towards one of those areas more than the other, though hopefully, you see the importance of both.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the need for having a balance between these two important truths. While both are important to have individually, the benefit they provide to our kids and to our families only strengthens when used together.

I am drawn to thinking about how much preparation connects with how we thought about the path and destination last week. The things that we should seek to put on our kids' paths, or even on our family's path, should be things that help to protect them. The Bible contains many references to protecting ourselves: the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), taking every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), and guarding our hearts (Proverbs 4:23). These actions do not happen by happenstance, though, not for us and certainly not for our kids. Preparing our kids involves conversations and actions taken to know God and know God's Word. We prepare our kids to battle the enemy and his lies, to stand strong in the world, and ultimately to live a life for Jesus when we teach them God's Word and God's ways. There are many good messages, podcasts, and books that aim to help us teach our kids, but the very best resource is the Word of God itself!

Combined with preparation is also protecting our kids. We use wisdom about how and when we should have conversations. While ultimately, there is nothing wrong with the desire to protect our kids, the unfortunate reality is that we are incapable of protecting them from everything. In some cases, protecting our kids can actually hurt how prepared they are to face the world (and this is coming from someone who loves to protect!). We must come to the realization that the best way we can protect our kids and our families is to make sure they are prepared for anything they may encounter. Psalm 127:3 tells us, ***"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord."*** These gifts that God has entrusted to us are precious and important, and it is within our role as parents to protect them, although we must also realize that, for all of us, our kids included, protection comes from the Lord.

The Bible has many passages that tell us our deliverance and protection come from God. Psalm 46:1 says, ***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*** Psalm 34:7 adds, ***"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them."*** These are two examples, though there are so many more! When we rest in knowing that God is sovereign, we know that He is in complete control no matter what troubles may befall us, and that our hope is in Jesus Christ.

So, parents, do not be afraid to prepare your kid. God knew what He was doing when He blessed you with them (even if you do not always feel like you know what you are doing!). We keep coming back to the fact that we need God's Word. Your kids need God's Word.

Sincerely Yours,
A parent trying to not always overprotect

4

WHAT IS PASSED ON

By Pastor Patrick Bicknell

Memory Verse

"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."
Psalm 145:4

In the late 1800s, an American educator, A.E. Winship, did a study between the descendants of Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes. Jonathan Edwards is one of the most famous theologians in history and was a prominent pastor during the Great Awakening in America in the 1700s. Max Jukes lived at the same time as Jonathan Edwards but was an atheist. The study he conducted was meant to look at the descendants of these two men about 150 years after they died. He wanted to see how their faith impacted the generations of kids they left behind. The results he found were fascinating. In his study of Jonathan Edwards, he found that he married a woman of like faith, and from this union, they had over 1,000 descendants. Of this number, he notes that there were 285 college graduates, 100 clergymen, 100 lawyers, 80 public office holders, 75 military officials, 65 professors, 60 doctors, 30 judges, 13 college presidents, three mayors, three governors, three United States senators, one dean of a medical school, one dean of a law school, and one vice president of the United States. In his study of Max Jukes, he found that he married a woman who was also an atheist, and from this union, they also had over 1,000 descendants. Of this number, he notes that 440 were physically wrecked by addiction to alcohol, 300 died prematurely, 310 were paupers (which means recipients of government aid), 150 convicts, 190 prostitutes, 60 thieves, and seven murderers.

1. What stands out to you with this study?

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The findings of this study are astonishing. If you are like me, it is even a reality check that makes me realize what I do now will greatly impact the generations that come after me. Now, just because we raise our kids in a Christian household does not mean that the generations after us are guaranteed to be successful and follow the Lord. However, many studies have come out that have similar findings. Our faith and how we raise our children greatly impact the generations to come after us. Today, we are going to continue

our study of the life of Abraham and discuss the things that we are leaving behind for our children and their children after them.

Genesis 25:1-5 records, ***"Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac."***

As we come to the end of Abraham's life, we see this very interesting passage of Scripture. Look at verse 5 again, ***"Abraham gave all he had to Isaac."***

2. What are some of the things that you think Abraham gave to Isaac?

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3. Do you think this passage is talking specifically about material possessions? Why or why not?

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This verse is talking about a couple of things. While it discusses the material possessions that Abraham left for Isaac, there is more to this verse than just cattle and wealth. The most important inheritance that Abraham left for Isaac was the promise that God had given to him. It is not only the Promised Land that God had sworn to give to Abraham's descendants but the promise that God would be their God. Genesis 17:8 reads, ***"And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*** This is a huge promise, and Abraham most certainly would have

taught it to Isaac. Abraham would have shown Isaac how God had been faithful to him throughout his life and that Isaac should put his faith in this mighty God.

4. What are some ways that Abraham would have reminded Isaac about this promise and his faith?

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5. What are some ways you share your faith with your children?

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Abraham did not only leave behind an amazing promise, but also some generational sins that plagued Isaac the same way they did his father. Just a chapter later in Genesis 26, we read that there is a famine in the land. Isaac wanted to go to Egypt to find food and relief from the famine, but the Lord appeared to him and told him not to go. The Lord again recited His covenant that He had promised to his father, Abraham, and told him to settle in Gerar. So, Isaac listened to the Lord, and as he settled in this land, we see that Isaac encountered a situation similar to that of Abraham.

Genesis 26:6-10 reads, ***"So Isaac settled in Gerar. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,' because she was attractive in appearance. When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. So Abimelech called Isaac and said, 'Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?' Isaac said to him, 'Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'' Abimelech said, 'What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.'"***

6. How is this situation similar to the situation Abraham experienced?

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7. What did Abraham leave to Isaac that may have caused him to sin here? Is this an example of generational sin?

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I believe this passage is a picture of what generational sin being passed down looks like. Although Abraham passed down his faith in the Lord to Isaac and Isaac picked that up by following the Lord, he also picked up the sins his father had. The Bible teaches about this aspect of generational sins or "curses" in Exodus.

Exodus 20:5 reads, ***"You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me."***

8. Is this passage teaching that God punishes children for sins their parents committed, even if they have not committed those sins? What do you think this verse is teaching?

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Although this verse may be a bit confusing and seem like God is being unjust, it is not teaching that God just punishes children for sins their parents commit even if they have not committed those sins. Rather, it is teaching that children will choose to repeat the sins of their fathers. What a child sees is what they do.

9. Has there been a time when your child did something that you did that you did not want them to see?

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I am sure all of us can think of a time when our child did something because they saw us do it, and our immediate thought was, "I have to be better than that." I know I have. Sometimes, more is caught than taught. The truth of the matter is that what we show our children, they will pick up, whether good or bad. That does not mean we need to be perfect, and if you are worried that you have not done a good job of teaching your child how to follow the Lord, I want to encourage you to look at the very next verse after that warning in Exodus 20:6, ***"But showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."***

10. How does this verse encourage you to lead your family to follow the Lord?

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11. What are some habits that you are passing down to your children? Are they godly or worldly things?

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12. What do you need to start doing to sow more of these godly seeds in your children's lives?

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The idea that the way we live greatly impacts how our children will turn out is a scary thought. Many of us can feel inadequate to pass

on these godly habits to our children, and the truth is that on our own, we are inadequate to do so. However, we know that we are not alone in this. God is the One who works through us. The Holy Spirit is able to provide us with all that we need to take on the important task of being godly fathers and mothers to our children. Not only that, but you have a church family who is here for you every step of the way, and when you need advice or some assistance, you can go to your Growth Community or Pastor, and they will be more than willing to help you.

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, we read, ***"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."***

13. What are some ways that you could encourage each other as a group to continue teaching our children to follow the Lord?

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NOTES

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

DEVOTION 1 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

Romans 4:1-5 says, ***"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."***

As we look back on the life of Abraham, we find that there are many things that he passed down to not only Isaac but to us as well. The New Testament records some of those great truths that impact us today. The first one we are looking at in the Romans passage is the idea of justification by faith. This may sound hard to understand, but essentially, it means that when we believe in Jesus, we are declared innocent or righteous in the eyes of God. This is a foundational truth for us if we are going to follow Jesus. It is crucial that we have this belief as a family.

Paul, the author of Romans, uses an analogy of works and gifts. Think of an allowance. A person receives their allowance when they finish chores. This means that whatever your allowance payment was, you earned it. However, when we receive a gift, it is not because we earned it but because someone wanted to give it to us. This is what salvation is for us. We cannot earn justification in God's eyes. We receive it as a gift through faith in Jesus.

What is the best gift you have ever received?

What is righteousness?

As a couple, do you model this grace in how your household is run?

How does it make you feel knowing you cannot earn your salvation?

Do you ever feel like there is something you have to do to make God happy with you?

Have you put your faith in Jesus? Why or why not?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to the earth to live and die for us. Help us to follow the example that Abraham left for us, to have faith and believe in You to save us. We pray that our family would believe in what Your Son did for us so that we would be saved. Lead us by Your Holy Spirit to put our full faith and trust in You. In Jesus name, Amen.*

HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

DEVOTION 2 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

Romans 4:13-15 says, ***"For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression."***

One of the most powerful things in a person's life is often a promise. This is true no matter what your age is, whether you are 5, 55, or 105. If someone gives you a promise, it is very important to you that they keep it. I am sure you can think about a time when someone gave you a promise and broke it. We know how sad that makes us feel and how that can ruin a relationship.

Here in Romans, a great promise is mentioned. We are told that we can become heirs, or someone who is a recipient of a blessing, of the best promise that has ever been given in the world. We read earlier in this book about the promise that was given to Abraham thousands of years ago. It is the promise that God will bless us and that He will be our God forever. How can we receive this promise? The answer is like the last devotion, by putting our faith in Jesus. If we put our faith in Him, the Bible says we are now recipients of this amazing promise. We can be sure that God will make sure this promise is fulfilled because He is far better than anyone or anything else in this world.

Are you good at keeping promises?

Has there ever been a time when someone broke a promise with you? How did that make you feel?

Has there ever been a time when someone kept a promise to you? How did that make you feel?

What is the promise that was given to Abraham?

What does it mean that we are now ***"heirs"*** to this promise through our faith in Christ?

As a family, how can we appreciate the amazing promise that God has given us?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for allowing us to become heirs of this amazing promise. Help us to cherish this promise more and more every day. Lead us to continually put our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a family, give us the strength to trust that You will be faithful to this promise in our lives no matter what we go through. In Jesus name, Amen.*

TRUSTING HIS FAITHFULNESS

DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

Hebrews 11:17-19 says, ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."***

What makes somebody trustworthy? For me, it is when someone is faithful. What I mean by that is they do what they say they are going to do. God promised to make a great nation through Abraham's offspring. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, waited 25 years for God to start fulfilling the promise. Finally, their son, Isaac, was born. God told Abraham that through his son, Isaac, the nation would be named.

Sometime after Isaac was born, God asked Abraham to do something that seemed crazy. God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac like a lamb (Um, excuse me?). Yes, you read that correctly. Abraham and Sarah had waited all those years for God to start fulfilling the promise, and now God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. However, Abraham trusted God's faithfulness because God always did what He said He would do. Abraham trusted God so much that he took Isaac and tied him to the altar, ready to sacrifice him. Abraham knew that God would keep His promise even if God had to raise Isaac from the dead. Just before Abraham made the sacrifice, God provided a ram to be used instead of Isaac. God was testing Abraham. Abraham trusted God's faithfulness!

Who is someone who is faithful in your family?

What makes that person faithful?

God was faithful to Abraham. God always did what He promised Abraham He would do. Parents, how has God been faithful in your life? Kids, how has God been faithful in your life?

If God has been faithful to you and your family in the past, can you trust Him at His word with your future? What are some steps you can take to learn to trust His faithfulness even more?

God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. How did God show His faithfulness in a similar way to the whole world (John 3:16)?

God faithfully sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. How do we trust Jesus to forgive us our sins and save us (Romans 10:9)?

Family Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You for being so faithful to us. Thank You for always doing what You promise You will do. Please help us when we are struggling with the difficulties of life. When things seem impossible, help us to remember how faithful You have been to us. Lord, remind us how faithful You are, and help us to remember how faithful You will be in our future. Lord, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice that can set all who believe in Him free from our sin. Lord, we love You and we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

FOLLOWING GOD NO MATTER WHAT

DEVOTION 4 - PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

Hebrews 11:8–10 says, ***"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."***

Imagine if God promised you and your family land in a foreign country. By faith, as a family, you had to obediently move to this foreign land. Your family would leave all your relatives, friends, and everything you knew behind. Also, imagine that in your lifetime and in the lifetime of your children, you never got to this land. You live the rest of your lives as campers, moving from place to place in a foreign land.

That is what happened to Abraham and his family. God called Abraham to move his family to a foreign land and leave everything they knew behind. God promised that someday, this land would be his family's land. The land became known as the Promised Land. Abraham and his family trusted God, and by the faith they had in God, they moved. Even though Abraham never fully saw this land, God did keep His promise, and Abraham's descendants would receive the land that God had promised. Abraham and his family never saw God's promise fully fulfilled in their lifetime. Amazingly, that did not keep them from trusting God; they followed God no matter what. By faith, they looked forward to someday being in Heaven with God instead of camping in a foreign land.

How would you rate your trust in God as a family on a scale of 1 to 10? (1 being the least, 10 being the greatest)

Are there circumstances in your family that make it hard to trust God?

What are some things that you as a family trust more than you trust God?

Abraham and his family were campers in a foreign land looking forward to Heaven. How does that resemble us as a Christian family now?

What are some concrete steps we could take as a family to follow God no matter what?

Family Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Lord, we love You. Lord, we thank You for always keeping Your promises. Sometimes in life, our circumstances can be so difficult and we can grow impatient waiting on You. Lord, sometimes in these situations we want to trust ourselves more than You. Forgive us for not fully trusting in You. Lord, we ask You for patience in these hard times. Remind us to turn to Your Word in these circumstances and look at all the promises You have kept. Lord, help us to remember that if we know You as Savior, this earth is not our home, we are just campers. Help us to focus on eternity with You and give us the strength to trust and follow You no matter what. Lord, we thank You and praise You. In Jesus name, Amen.*

JESUS GAVE IT ALL

DEVOTION 5 - PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

Isaiah 53:5-6 says, ***"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."***

In Genesis chapter 25, at the end of his life, we see that Abraham gave everything that he had to Isaac. It is the picture of a father leaving this life and leaving behind all that he had for his son. Abraham had other sons and daughters, but the Bible specifically says that he left everything for Isaac. This was the child through whom God was going to bring about His promise. It is a picture of the One that would allow us to be reunited with God and become heirs to this same promise. The One being spoken about is Jesus.

Just as Abraham gave all that he had for his child, Jesus gave it all for our sake. Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross. He was given the punishment that we deserved but could never afford. He paid the price of death that we all owed. He gave it all so that we could, by belief in Him, be reunited with God and join in on the promise given to Abraham, becoming a member of the family of the Lord. By believing in Jesus and His willingness to give it all on the cross for our sake, and by repenting and turning away from our sins, we become His children and will spend an eternity praising His name in Heaven. There has never been a more perfect or loving sacrifice. The fact that our Heavenly Father would send His own Son to die in our place is such an astounding truth.

What will you do with such a truth?

What does it mean to sacrifice?

Has anyone in your life ever sacrificed anything for you?

How much do you think God loves you based on what we just talked about?

How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus paid the price for your sins so that you do not have to?

Have you put your faith in Jesus? Why or why not?

Family Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your son to the earth to live and die for us. Help us to recognize what a price it was that He paid for our sake on that cross. Help us not to take His sacrifice for granted and to allow the Holy Spirit to move us towards repentance and belief. Guide our family closer to You and lead us to placing our full trust in You always. Help us to desire You above all else and always remember how much You love us as a good father. In Jesus name, Amen.*

A LETTER TO PARENTS
DEVOTION 6 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

Dear Parent,

As I prepare to write my final letter to you, I pray that God has somehow spoken to you through these words. I told you before, and I stand by it now; I am just a parent trying to figure things out, hopefully, just like you. The more I learn regarding parenting and the Bible, the more I realize just how much more I need to learn. By no means do I believe I have it all down or know it all, but I hope God has poked your heart in some way through these letters.

Today, we will talk about what gets passed on. This idea seems relatively simple but has such profound implications. It is really hard to pass on something that we ourselves do not have. We see this in everyday life skills. For the parent who does not know how to cook well, it is not surprising when the child does not know how to cook well. Now, that child could grow up to figure out ways to cook with good recipes to use, though that skill did not come from the parent. Turn that to your child's spiritual walk. As their parent, the one who spends the most time with them, you have the ability to help your child become rooted and grounded in God's Word by knowing who Jesus is and what He did for them. Tie this into our other discussions of the path and destination as well as preparing and protecting. If you are not helping to prepare your child, if you are not evaluating the things and people on their path, at some point, they will go searching. The world will try to give a lot of answers for the meaning of life and why we should or should not live a life for Christ. We read Jesus' words in Matthew 4:4, ***"But he answered, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every***

word that comes from the mouth of God."" We live standing on the Word of God.

Pause for just a moment; we are talking about passing something on. Parent, it starts with you. It starts with you taking the time to know God and know God's Word. It starts with you having a real relationship with Jesus. There is a lot going on in a day, and I get that. Life can be overwhelming and busy, and I get that, too. Sometimes, we have really good intentions to pick up our Bible and read it, but we never get to it. I can relate. My encouragement to you: keep trying. Keep working to make your relationship with God a priority. Keep showing your kids the love of Jesus Christ. Keep talking about who God is and how His Word tells us to live. Keep it up. Pass it on. Genesis 25:5 writes, ***"Abraham gave all he had to Isaac."*** Maybe the world wants to tell us that the greatest thing we can give to our kids will be money or material things. By this point, I hope you can guess I am not going to agree with that. If I am going to give all I have to my kids, I hope I pass on Jesus because there is nothing greater.

With much love,
A parent trying to raise my kids to know Jesus

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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