

## **Devotional Series**

### **A Journey of Faith: A Study on the Life of Abraham**

#### **Introduction by Glenda Simpkins Hoffman**

I love this time of year because it marks a turn in the journey of faith for me. I try to spend time the week between Christmas and New Year's giving God gratitude for the blessings of this life as well as acknowledging any grief or regrets as I entrust them to God in prayer. But what I especially think and pray about is how God might be inviting me to intentionally arrange my life to follow him in the year ahead. There are always things we need to leave behind or let go of in order to move out into the new and hopeful future God has for us. This is not easy; it can be difficult and painful, but it is an act of faith.

Abraham is a wonderful model of what faith looks like. Genesis 12 marks the beginning of his journey of faith:

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. 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.'

It doesn't seem possible, but five years ago I received the call to come to Vienna Presbyterian Church. My family and I spent months packing, giving things away, and preparing for a move to a new community, a new church, and new home. It was hard to say goodbye to people we had loved and cared about for ten years, but it was time. We grieved leaving the place we knew and the people we loved, but God had made it clear that we were to go to Vienna, and so we went by faith, not knowing a lot about where we were going.

Every new year brings an opportunity to leave the old year behind with its joys, sorrow, triumphs, and tragedies and move into a new, though unknown and even uncertain future. I am filled with joy and gratitude for how God has helped us to make our home in Vienna and for the sense of belonging and home that my family now has here. Although my transition from 2011 to 2012 will not be about a physical move, there are still ways I need to let go and things I need to leave behind in order to follow Christ and to have his life formed in me. That is true for all of us.

Hebrews 11 is often called the Hall of Faith as it provides wonderful portraits of the faithful people who have gone before us. This is what it says of Abraham:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

We will see that Abraham was not perfect. He made a lot of mistakes, but he lived by faith continuing to trust God to do for him what only God could do. Our hope and prayer is that God will use our study of Abraham to help us understand what it means to live by faith in the midst of our everyday, ordinary lives. May we understand more and more what it means to be blessed by God and arrange our lives to live out the blessing of God and to be a blessing to others.

## Week 1—Genesis 12—December 26, 2011

### Monday Genesis 11:27-32

Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out 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 two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

#### Reflect

What do you learn about Abram and his family and his background from this passage? Where do you see God at work in preparing Abram?

#### Respond

Reflect on your life. What are the relationships and experiences God used in your life to prepare you for his call on your life? Take time to remember and give thanks for God's faithfulness.

### Tuesday Genesis 12:1-3

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. 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

#### Reflect

God chose Abram to be his follower. What were the implications for his life? What was Abram being asked to do? What was the cost of obeying God? What were the promise and the hope? What do you think it meant for Abram to have the blessing of God on his life?

#### Respond

Reflect on your life. When did you first become aware of God choosing you? What were the implications for your life? What was the cost of following Christ? How has your life changed? What new direction might God be asking you to take in the New Year to follow him as his disciple? Are you willing for God to do anything to shape and mold your life? If you are, how do you know that? If you are not, what is keeping you from that kind of relationship with God?

### **Wednesday** *Genesis 12:4-6*

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

#### **Reflect**

What was Abram's response? Think about what it meant for Abram to leave his homeland with his family and possession to obey God. Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." Why was Abram willing to trust God?

#### **Respond**

How do you feel about leaving the year 2011 and moving into the year 2012? What is God calling you to leave behind to trust him more deeply in the year ahead? What would you say that God is beginning in your life? In your family? In your church? Do you sense a stirring in your heart and life and family? What would it look like for you to live as a person of deep and abiding faith in the coming year?

### **Thursday** *Genesis 12:7-9*

Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages towards the Negeb.

#### **Reflect**

God reveals to Abraham the land that his descendants will inherit. What is Abram's response? What does this tell you about his attitude toward God and his promises?

#### **Response**

Think about what God has done for you this past year. How has God revealed himself to you? What gifts has he given you? What promises or dreams has he fulfilled? What is your response? Take time individually, as a family, and/or with a small group to express your gratitude to God and to worship him for whom he is.

## **Friday** *Genesis 12:10-13*

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, ‘I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, “This is his wife”; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.’

### **Reflect**

Abram probably is telling a partial truth, for Sarai was probably his half-sister. What does this incident tell you about Abram? What is Abram now focusing on? How do you make sense of his great faith in previous verses and his obvious fear and attempts to manage the real danger he is facing? How are his actions self-serving and dishonoring to Sarai?

### **Respond**

As you look to the future, are you experiencing anxiety or fear? What challenges are you facing? How are you trying to manage or control your circumstances in ways that may be self-serving but dishonoring to others around you—especially those closest to you?

## **Saturday** *Genesis 12:14-16*

When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels.

But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, “She is my sister”, so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and be gone.’ And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

### **Reflect**

What was the impact of Abram’s actions? While his attempt to manage his circumstances in his own way may at first appeared to be “working,” what were the long-term effects of his lack of faith in God and failure to respond to the call of God? Though Sarai has no voice in this scenario, how does God intervene to save her?

### **Respond**

Take time to reflect on this past year of your life. Be honest with God and yourself about your attempts to manage your life apart from God. What has been the impact of your actions? How has that appeared to be working at first? What have been the long-term negative impacts? How has God intervened in ways that were needed? Ask God to continue to reveal his will for you in the coming year. Commit yourself to trusting, following, and obeying him in the year ahead.

## **Sunday**

### **Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

### **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 2—Genesis 13 & 14—January 2, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 13:1-7*

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. He journeyed on by stages 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 on the name of the Lord.

#### **Reflect**

Even though Abram had failed, he returns to Bethel where he had built an altar and there he called on the Lord. What does this tell you about Abram's heart? What does this tell you about God?

#### **Response**

What are some failures you have suffered? Are you still carrying the weight of your failures or the guilt of your sin? Have you turned to the Lord and truly received the unconditional love and forgiveness of God? Take time to write down any known sin, failures, or burdens that you are carrying. Release them to the Lord by tearing up or even burning the piece of paper you have written on. Find an object (like a stone or a candle) to place somewhere that will daily remind you of God's action to renew and refine you by his grace and power.

### Tuesday *Genesis 13:8-13*

Then Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. 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.' Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan 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 had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastwards; thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

#### **Reflect**

God showers Abram and his family with blessings. Note the many ways these blessings are described in this passage. What are the problems as well as the possibilities the blessings bring?

What people do with their blessings determines whether they remain blessings or become curses. How does Abram's response demonstrate faith and humility? What does the conflict between Abram and Lot and their respective choices reveal about their character?

## **Respond**

Take time to actually write down the evidence of blessing in your life and to thank God for all he has done and the many ways he has provided. What are the problems as well as the possibilities your blessings bring to you? What conflicts are you facing? Conflict does not make character; it reveals what's in the heart. Take time in prayer to ask for God's direction and guidance.

## **Wednesday** *Genesis 13:14-18*

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.' So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord.

## **Reflect**

This is the first time that Abram actually sees and understands that this is the very land that God has promised to give him and his offspring. Why do you think this promise is stated again? Why is it important for Abram and later his descendants to remember the promise of the Lord?

## **Respond**

What are the circumstances of your life right now? Take time to remember some of the promises of God to you and reflect on why they are important at this juncture in your life.

## **Thursday** *Genesis 14:1-12*

In the days of King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim, these kings made war with King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea). For twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the edge of the wilderness; then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed

**Reflect**

Why do you think so much detailed historical information regarding the king of that time is included in the texts? What is significant about how this section ends? How does it make you feel to know that the God of all the earth and all kingdoms sees the predicament of one person and cares?

**Respond**

Consider the headlines in the news this week and all the significant events happening in the world. Now contemplate that God knows and cares about all these things, but he cares specifically about you and your concerns today. Take time to pray about what is on your heart and to carry your concerns before the throne of grace.

**Friday *Genesis 14:13-16***

Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his nephew Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

**Reflect**

Why do you think Abram was willing to act against the armies of four major nations? Abram's actions are those of a loving family member who is willing to step into dangerous circumstances to care for someone in his family. What resources did Abram employ? What were the results?

**Respond**

Has anyone gone out of their way at great risk or cost to themselves to love you, care for you, or to help you in an incredibly sacrificial way? Consider your family or close friends. What are you willing to do to love and care for them in a sacrificial way? How is God calling you to take risks to love someone in your life who needs it right now?

## **Saturday** *Genesis 14:17-24*

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said,

'Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!'

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the people, but take the goods for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, "I have made Abram rich." I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share.'

### **Reflect**

What was the response of others to Abram's victory? What did the king of Sodom ask for? Why did Abram refuse? Why was this important? How did Abram make sure God was glorified and not himself or someone else?

### **Respond**

Has your heart remained true to God? How would someone know that it has? When have you been tempted to take glory for yourself or to give it to another? How do you give God the glory? How does your life reflect to others your desire to give glory to God in all you say and do?

## **Sunday**

### **Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

### **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 3—Genesis 15—January 9, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 15:1-3*

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, 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, ‘You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.’

#### **Reflect**

Why is Abram afraid? God promised Abram that he would be a great nation, yet he remains childless. In the ancient culture, this was not only a sign of *not* being blessed; it was an economic and familial crisis. Why and how one can continue to trust in a promise of God when the evidence against the promise is all around?

#### **Respond**

Are there circumstances in your life that are causing you anxiety and even fear? Do you doubt God’s presence, promises, and power? Are you looking for human solutions or trusting God? Take the reality of your life, your circumstances, and your feelings to the Lord in prayer. The great question is whether we will stand frightened or afraid of what the future holds or whether we can trust God and dare to cultivate a future together with him. How will you answer that great question for yourself?

### Tuesday *Genesis 15:4-6*

But the word of the Lord came to him, ‘This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.’ He brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

#### **Reflect**

How did God respond to Abram’s protest? At the root of this passage is the question, “Is God a God who can be trusted to do what he has said?” What is Abram’s answer to the question?

#### **Respond**

Faith is a matter not of merit but readiness to accept what God has promised. Are you known as a person of this kind of faith? How long would you wait for God to fulfill his promise to you?

### Wednesday *Genesis 15:7-8*

Then he said to him, ‘I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.’ But he said, ‘O Lord God how am I to know that I shall possess it?’

**Reflect**

God reiterates here his promises regarding the land. What does Abram's question reveal about his humanity and his relationship with God? Do you think his question reveals faith or a lack of faith? Why?

**Respond**

Delayed promises can diminish faith or strengthen faith! How do you respond to delayed promises? Do you have an intimate relationship with God that believes God and waits for him to do what he has said? Explain.

**Thursday Genesis 15:9-11**

He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

**Reflect**

In this rite, participants passed between divided animals and solemnly sealed, or "cut," the agreement (covenant). The fate of the slaughtered animal will be the fate of anyone who transgresses the covenant. This covenant ceremony is initiated by God and enacted by Abram. How does this ceremony serve to help Abram in his humanness? What does this tell you about the life of faith?

**Respond**

Baptism is the sign and the seal of what God has done for us. The water reminds us that by the blood of Christ our sins are washed away and by the power of the Spirit we are purified and renewed to a new and different kind of life. Does your life reflect the reality of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus? Why or why not?

**Friday Genesis 15:12-16**

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'

**Reflect**

God takes seriously Abram's question in verse 8. He answers by explaining when these things will take place. In this time of uncertainty, what does God say Abram can know for certain? Why is it significant that Abram was the first to know such details about that future—one that anticipates the book of Exodus, a story of bondage and waiting? What does Abram's future hold? How do you think the information given will help him as he waits for an heir along with other promises during the course of a very long life?

**Respond**

What are some of the promises of God that you can know for sure? What are some things you are waiting for now and may be waiting for a long time? In times of uncertainty, we are often flooded with questions of why and want to have answers. How can you turn your attention to the faithfulness of God's character and rely on the promises he has given you?

**Saturday *Genesis 15:17-21***

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'

**Reflect**

God takes seriously Abram's question by also explaining where these things will take place, giving details about the land his descendants will possess. Why is it significant that this information is included?

**Respond**

How has God taken seriously your concerns and questions in the past? How has your trust in him grown as a result? How can your past experience of God's faithfulness be an encouragement to you now in your present circumstances?

**Sunday****Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

**Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 4—Genesis 16—January 16, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 16:1-2*

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, 'You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

#### **Reflect**

Probably ten years has passed. What does Sarai want? How does she propose getting it? What does this tell you about her desire? What is Sarai focused on? What does this tell you about her trust in God? Is Sarai's response sinful? Why or why not? How does Abram respond? Is Abram's response sinful? Why or why not?

#### **Respond**

Reflect on your life and recall a circumstance in which you sought to apply human solutions to a problem. How did that turn out? Have you ever given or received wrong advice? When are you tempted to listen to the inner voice of anxiety or the human counsel of others versus listening to God's word and relying on his promises and obeying his will?

### Tuesday *Genesis 16:3-4*

So, after Abram had lived for ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

#### **Reflect**

While Abram and Sarai's action may have been an acceptable practice in the ancient world, why was it wrong for them? How did Abram and Sarai's "solution" become a problem? What were some of the consequences of their sinful actions?

#### **Respond**

How has sin brought consequences to your life and the lives of others? Are there any ways that you are objectifying or using others to meet your needs? Ask God to reveal any sin in your life. Confess and repent and receive God's forgiveness. Share this with a trusted friend and ask God the next steps to live a new and different kind of life.

### Wednesday *Genesis 16:5-6*

Then Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl 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, 'Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

**Reflect**

What does Sarai say to Abram? How does Abram respond to Sarai? What does this tell you about his focus and the condition of his heart? How does Sarai treat Hagar? What does this tell you about her focus and the condition of her heart?

**Respond**

Take time to notice what you think about, what you talk about, how you talk about it, and how you treat other people (family, friends, and even strangers). What does this reflect about your focus and the condition of your heart?

Meditate and even memorize Proverbs 3:5-6:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

**Thursday Genesis 16:7-10**

The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, ‘Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?’ She said, ‘I am running away from my mistress Sarai.’ The angel of the Lord said to her, ‘Return to your mistress, and submit to her.’ The angel of the Lord also said to her, ‘I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.’

**Reflect**

Where does God appear to Hagar? What do the images of water and wilderness convey about her need and how God will meet her need? What does God’s question and direction to Hagar tell you about his concern for her?

**Respond**

Have you ever experienced rejection? What was that like for you? How was it a kind of wilderness for you? How has God’s love and acceptance of you been a kind of renewing water washing over you? How have promises or reassurances from God served as consolation in times of desolation?

**Friday Genesis 16:11-12**

And the angel of the Lord said to her,  
‘Now you have conceived and shall bear a son;  
you shall call him Ishmael,  
for the Lord has given heed to your affliction.  
He shall be a wild ass of a man,  
with his hand against everyone,  
and everyone’s hand against him;  
and he shall live at odds with all his kin.’

**Reflect**

Hagar had been focused on the past; now God reveals to her a future. How does this provide comfort and reassurance? What impact do you think it gave her to know that “the Lord has given heed to your affliction”? How do these verses reveal that Hagar, the cast-off slave woman and surrogate mother, a victim of patriarchal subordination, still has a very special place in this story?

## **Respond**

God's promises to Hagar begin to reveal that the promissory blessing is to include "all the families of the earth" (12:3). Do your actions toward others (particularly the marginalized or outsiders) convey the attitude of Abram and Sarai or the covenant love and grace of God who sees the needs of the oppressed? How does this passage challenge you to live differently?

## **Saturday Genesis 16:13-15**

So she named the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?' Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

## **Reflect**

Hagar is the "first person in all of Scripture to receive an angelic messenger from God. She is the first person to name God, calling him Elroi, which means 'God sees'" (*Spiritual Formation Bible* notes). The name Ishmael means "God hears." Why are these names important to Hagar's story? Does Hagar's response reflect a faith in God? Why or why not?

## **Respond**

Think about your own life and circumstances. What does it mean to you to know that God sees and God hears? Does your response reflect faith in God's character and promises? Why or why not?

## **Sunday**

### **Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

### **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 5—Genesis 17—January 23, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 17:1-4*

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.’ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.’

#### **Reflect**

Thirteen years have passed since Ishmael’s birth. God reveals a new name for himself in these verses. Why do you think he would want to clarify his identity by giving a new name at this time? Why do you think God chooses to renew his covenant? What is the focus of the promise here?

#### **Respond**

God is always doing something new, and so in this new moment, he reveals a new name to shape a new future. When has God done something new in your life? What new or deeper understanding of God did you gain? Take time to thank God for the many ways he has and continues to reveal himself to you.

### Tuesday *Genesis 17:5-8*

‘No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.’

#### **Reflect**

With the renewal of the covenant, God gives Abram a new name: Abraham, “father of a multitude”. Why is this significant? Who initiates and establishes this covenant? Why is that important? What are the promises? Whom are the promises for?

#### **Respond**

Reflect on the beginning of your faith journey. What have been some of the significant turning points in your faith journey? How did God use those experiences or relationships in your life to cultivate a deeper trust in him and reveal new direction for your life? How might he be doing that even now? Ask God for his guidance and direction for the future he has for you.

### **Wednesday** *Genesis 17:9-14*

God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.’

#### **Reflect**

What was the responsibility of Abraham and his descendants in the covenant? What does it mean to “keep the covenant”? What was the sign of the covenant? Why do you think God chose a sign “in your flesh” for his everlasting covenant?

#### **Respond**

God reveals himself and his ways to those he can trust. How much can God trust you? Is the nature of your faith accompanied by a life lived consistently and obediently with God?

### **Thursday** *Genesis 17:15-18*

God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘O that Ishmael might live in your sight!’

#### **Reflect**

God specifically states that his covenant promise of descendants shall come from Sarai, who will no longer be called Sarah. What is Abraham’s response? What does he say? What does this reflect about him?

#### **Respond**

Think of an opportunity you were given to believe God and obey him. Was yours a response of faith or fear or skepticism? What a person does spontaneously in God’s presence indicates the true condition of his heart toward God. What is your response to God? Describe the quality of your worship? How might God be inviting you to respond differently to him?

## **Friday** *Genesis 17:19-22*

God said, 'No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.' And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

### **Reflect**

How did God clarify his covenant? How would this impact Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael, and others? What response would be required of Abraham based on God's word?

### **Respond**

Is there any area of your life where you need clarity? Are there others who are or will be impacted by this? How does that make you feel? Do you really want to know the will of God so that you can do it? Are you willing to obey and cooperate with God, whatever he reveals? Take time to talk about this with the Lord in prayer.

## **Saturday** *Genesis 17:23-27*

Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

### **Reflect**

What does Abraham's obedience tell you about his relationship with God? Abraham's faith included others in the blessing of God. Who are some of those people?

### **Respond**

What does your obedience or lack of obedience tell others about your relationship with God? Who are the others around you who have been (or could be) drawn into the blessing of God? Take time to pray for those people right now.

# Sunday

## **Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

## **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 6—Genesis 18—January 30, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 18:1-2*

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.

#### **Reflect**

Though the narrative announces that this is a theophany (an appearance of God), does Abraham understand that at this point? How does he greet them? What does this tell you about his sense of social obligation?

#### **Respond**

Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hospitality is not entertaining; it is making room to show others love, particularly to those outside our normal circle of friends and family. Are you available and willing to respond to God and others with your whole self in the midst of the busyness and mundane affairs of everyday life?

### Tuesday *Genesis 18:3-5*

He said, ‘My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.’ So they said, ‘Do as you have said.’

#### **Reflect**

Middle Eastern culture is known for its generous hospitality. What would it have cost Abraham and Sarah (time, money, other resources) to demonstrate this kind of hospitality?

#### **Respond**

How does your life reflect a spirit of sacrificial and generous hospitality? How does it fail to? What adjustments do you need to make? In the coming week or month, invite an acquaintance to your home and prepare and serve the best food you can afford. Monitor your reactions as a person you barely know enjoys your hospitality.

### Wednesday *Genesis 18:6-8*

And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

**Reflect**

Why do you think Sarah responded as she did? How do you interpret Sarah's response to this news? What might your response have been in the same circumstances?

**Respond**

Have you ever laughed at the thought that something good could actually happen to you? Have you ever doubted that God can do miracles? Have you ever focused on the limitations of human experience rather than the possibilities of God's powerful actions? How are you responding to God right now in the midst of your present circumstances?

**Thursday Genesis 18:9-10**

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

**Reflect**

This event would require a miracle to happen. Time and again, the presence or promise of God is revealed in scripture in the birth of a child. Why do you think this is so? What are some other special births in the Bible, and why were they significant? Why do you think God took so long to cause Sarah to become pregnant? Is there any question about who is in control of all that is happening?

**Respond**

Contemplate this question: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" Do you really believe that is true? Why or why not? How might God be inviting you to trust him to do something surprising and unexpected? How might God be inviting you to trust him to do what only he can do?

**Friday Genesis 18:11-12**

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?'

**Reflect**

What does God's willingness to share his plans with Abraham tell you about their relationship? What does Abraham's concern about people he doesn't even know—particularly the righteous—tell you about him? What does Abraham's willingness to talk with God to try to negotiate tell you about his faith in God and relationship with God?

**Respond**

What do your attitudes and actions tell you about your concern for people? The nature of your character? Your relationship with God?

## **Saturday** *Genesis 18:13-15*

The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.’ But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’

### **Reflect**

How has Abraham’s ongoing experience of God’s faithfulness brought him to the point that he is bold to negotiate with God for the sake of the righteous? How do Abraham’s actions reflect God’s faithfulness in his own life? Make a list of the things you believe a relationship with God brings out in a person’s life.

### **Respond**

Only a confident faith in God brings a person to such boldness in God’s presence. How does your prayer life compare to that of Abraham’s? What area of your prayer life needs special attention? Make a list of some of the things you believe your relationship with God has brought out in your life.

## **Sunday**

### **Reflect**

Look over the week’s readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

### **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 7—Genesis 18 & 19—February 6, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 18:16-26*

Then the men set out from there, and they looked towards Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.’ Then the Lord said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.’ So the men turned from there, and went towards Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham came near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’ And the Lord said, ‘If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.’

#### **Reflect**

How do Lot’s actions reflect a similar faith in God and spirit of hospitality as we have already seen in Abraham? What does this tell you about Lot?

#### **Respond**

Lot’s actions show a faith in God, but he has chosen to live in a sinful city that has undoubtedly shaped him in undesirable ways. How do your attitudes and actions reflect your trust in God? How do your attitudes and actions reflect that you have been shaped by the culture in which you live?

### Tuesday *Genesis 18:27-33*

Abraham answered, ‘Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?’ And he said, ‘I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.’ Again he spoke to him, ‘Suppose forty are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of forty I will not do it.’ Then he said, ‘Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.’ He answered, ‘I will not do it, if I find thirty there.’ He said, ‘Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.’ Then he said, ‘Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.’ And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

**Reflect**

The depth of the sin and depravity of the men of Sodom becomes painfully apparent in this passage. How do you think Lot might have rationalized by believing there was no harm in living near these sinful people as long as he and his family remained moral? Why would a righteous and godly man fall into such ties with them and lead his family to do the same? How is Lot now faced with the consequences of his accommodating and compromising actions? What appears to be the cost to him? Who intervenes to save Lot and his family?

**Respond**

What are the ways that you accommodate and compromise to the culture around you? Have there been costs to that? What have they been? In what ways might you be falling into ties with sin and leading your family to do the same? Is God asking you to change direction? What does that look like for you? Are there ways you need to confess and repent?

**Wednesday *Genesis 19:1-11***

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, 'Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.' They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the square.' But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.' But they replied, 'Stand back!' And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.' Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

**Reflect**

What does Lot's concern for his guests tell you about him? What does his lack of concern for his daughters tell you about him? How does God intervene, and why is this significant? What does this passage say about God's attitude toward communal sin?

**Respond**

How does this passage speak to us and our culture? Take time to pray for yourself and other Christians to live a faithful lifestyle.

## **Thursday** *Genesis 19:12-22*

Then the men said to Lot, ‘Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.’ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, ‘Up, get out of this place; for the Lord is about to destroy the city.’ But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city.’ But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city. When they had brought them outside, they said, ‘Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed.’ And Lot said to them, ‘Oh, no, my lords; your servant has found favour with you, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!’ He said to him, ‘Very well, I grant you this favour too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.’ Therefore the city was called Zoar.

### **Reflect**

Why do you think Lot’s future sons-in-law didn’t take him seriously? Why does Lot linger? What does this tell you about his perspective about what is going on? What finally causes Lot to be brought away from the city? Why did God do this?

### **Respond**

What communal sin have you heard about or witnessed recently? How do you think God feels about injustice? Do you take God’s attitude toward sin seriously or do you linger in order to weigh your options? Has God ever been merciful to you and rescued you from your own bad choices? How so? When you consider the lengths that God has gone to in Christ Jesus to rescue you, would you say your life demonstrates an attitude of gratitude or self-focus? How might God be asking you to change your perspective?

## **Friday** *Genesis 19:24-29*

Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord; and he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the Plain, and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace. So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled.

## **Reflect**

Because God is holy and just and takes sin seriously, he brings judgment; but out of mercy and for Abraham's sake he rescues Lot. However, Lot lost his wife, his home, all his possessions, and even his family's moral purity. How does this passage demonstrate the necessity of listening to and obeying God?

## **Respond**

Lot was a follower of God in a poisonous environment. Reflect on your environment. What in your neighborhood, work, and culture encourages you in your life with God and what draws you away from God? Is there anything that is poisoning you or your family that needs to be dealt with immediately?

## **Saturday Genesis 19:30-38**

Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, 'Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day.

## **Reflect**

Lot who had earlier offered his daughters to be objects of sexual abuse now becomes the object. How do the daughters' actions reflect the attitude of their father? What do you suppose their future holds, given their displacement and the situation they find themselves in due to the failure of their father? How do their actions reflect their desperation about their future? The consequences of Lot's actions would have ramifications for generations.

## **Respond**

Consider the brokenness of so many who come from abusive families or who have suffered sexual abuse. Take time to pray that God will intervene to bring healing and wholeness. Make plans to participate in an upcoming Virtus training at VPC in order to gain a better understanding of sexual abuse and become an advocate for those who are often without a voice.

# **Sunday**

## **Reflect**

Look over the week's readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

## **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

## Week 8—Genesis 21 & 22—February 13, 2012

### Monday *Genesis 21:1-8*

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’ And she said, ‘Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’ The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

#### **Reflect**

Name the promises that are fulfilled and the problems that arise in this passage. Abraham and Sarah have waited 25 years for this son. How does the passage describe their feelings? Why is Isaac’s name significant?

#### **Respond**

Have you ever experienced the fulfillment of some deep longings that led to some relational tensions you did not expect? What was that like for you or others around you? How has God given you words of encouragement or direction in those situations? What situations are you currently facing that you need God to speak into today?

### Tuesday *Genesis 21:9-13*

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.’ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.’

#### **Reflect**

Why did Sarah treat Hagar and Ishmael the way she did? Do you think she was justified? Why or why not? How does the passage describe Abraham? How does God comfort Abraham?

#### **Respond**

Families of all kinds experience dynamics that can be very stressful and hurtful. What people in your life threaten you? Who are the people who might be threatened by you? How can you love and encourage people around you today so that they experience divine blessing rather than human posturing?

### **Wednesday** *Genesis 21:14-21*

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, 'Do not let me look on the death of the child.' And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

#### **Reflect**

What does Hagar first imagine her future holds? How does God intervene? How does God care for Hagar and Ishmael? What are the promises given?

#### **Respond**

What does this passage say about those who are not chosen? What do we learn about God's concern for outsiders? Reflect on your own attitudes toward others. Are they in line with God's compassion and care?

### **Thursday** *Genesis 22:1-8*

After these things God tested Abraham. He 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 that I shall show you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

#### **Reflect**

How does Abraham respond when God calls his name? What does he do when God directs him to sacrifice his son? What do his directions to the others with him tell you about what he thinks is going to happen? How does Abraham respond when Isaac calls to him? How does Abraham answer Isaac's question? What does this tell you about what Abraham thinks is going to happen?

**Respond**

How has God refined your life? Describe how God has developed your relationship with him. Have you ever faced a test that seemed impossible and incongruent with what you understood about God?

**Friday Genesis 22:9-14**

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'

**Reflect**

What do you think was going through Abraham's mind? What might have been going through Isaac's mind? Why did God test Abraham? What was at stake? How does God provide? What does this tell us about God?

**Respond**

What went through your mind the last time God asked you to obey him? Does your life reflect the activity of God shaping and preparing you over the years? Does your life reflect a deep trust in God's abiding love, eternal promises, and perfect character? Have you set in motion an immediate process of obedience because you trust him? What adjustments might you need to make?

**Saturday Genesis 22:15-19**

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.' So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

**Reflect**

What is the promise given to Abraham? What is the reason for the promise? Why are Abraham's faith and obedience so critical at this juncture of God's redemptive history?

## **Respond**

Abraham was willing to offer his only son, but God provided the ram. This story points to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Meditate on this truth: God has provided for our need in Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

## **Sunday**

### **Reflect**

Look over the week’s readings and questions. Remember your experiences of God and your glimpses of truth during the week.

### **Respond**

What seems most significant from the past week? How do you want your insights to impact your life in this new year? What do you want to say to God at this time?

In the months ahead we will continue to explore the meaning of faith in the new sermon series *iBelieve*. During Lent, the sermons and accompanying devotions will explore how true belief in our great Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—makes a difference as we apply our faith to our everyday lives.