

God Makes a Promise

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God established a covenant people as a vehicle to bless the entire world.

MAIN PASSAGES: Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6; 17:1-10

There is something that draws us into stories of people who overcome all odds, even great failure, to defy all expectations and succeed. We like the idea of “ordinary” people doing the extraordinary. Perhaps because that is how most of us see ourselves, as an ordinary person longing to make a difference in the world.



What stories of unexpected success encourage you?

Group Time

Point 1: God's covenant people are established with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4).

¹ The LORD said to Abram:

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

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

God called on Abram to take a step of faith. Abram was to leave three things (v. 1):

- _____
- _____
- _____

If Abram obeyed and stepped out in faith, God would do three things for him (vv. 2-3):

- _____
- _____
- _____



How should knowing the character of God impact our trust and obedience?

God was determined to bless Abram through a covenant relationship, but the blessing God was promising to give Abram was not intended to end with him; it was a means to an end. Abram would benefit from God's blessing, but he was to be a conduit of blessing, not its final recipient. God was going to bless Abram so he could, in turn, bless the whole world.



Whom has God placed in your life for you to be His conduit of blessing? How can you be a blessing to this person?

Point 2: God's covenant people are to trust His promises (Gen. 15:1-6).

¹ After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great.

² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir."

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

God came to Abram saying his reward would be great. But instead of gratitude, Abram responded with doubt, perhaps even cynicism, because he had not yet been blessed with a son. So in an effort to help God out, Abram offered up a slave in his home to be his promised "heir." How often we mistake God's apparent *inactivity* for His *inability*.



How have you tried to "help" God out? How did it turn out?

God responded in mercy and grace to Abram's doubt and resignation. No, Eliezer would not be Abram's heir. God would give him a son from his own body. And then the Lord took Abram outside and invited him to count the stars.

God Is Faithful: God's faithfulness means

He keeps His _____ and always fulfills His _____. We _____ God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.



Voices from Church History

"What greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful?"¹

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Point 3: God's covenant people are to be set apart for His glory (Gen. 17:1-10).

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, “I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and be blameless. ² I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly.”

³ Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him: ⁴ “As for me, here is my covenant with you: You will become the father of many nations. ⁵ Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. ⁷ I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. ⁸ And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.”

⁹ God also said to Abraham, “As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep my covenant. ¹⁰ This is my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you, which you are to keep: Every one of your males must be circumcised.”

God had been changing Abram and growing his faith over the years, a process called *sanctification*. The result was a deeper faith and growing obedience. God marked Abram's changing life with a name change. No longer Abram, now he would be Abraham, “father of a multitude.”

Where would you put your desire to obey God in faith on this scale?



No Desire

With Total Abandon

As we read of God changing Abraham, we cannot lose sight of the bigger picture. God was changing and blessing Abraham so that he might become a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3). Like Abraham, God's plan is to bring blessing to others through His blessings to us.



How does God's plan to use you as part of His story of redemption help you understand what He is doing in your life right now?

My Mission

Because we have been made part of Abraham's family of faith through Christ, we live as people through whom God's blessings may flow to the world.

- **What promises of God do you need to believe in because you know God is faithful?**
- **Who are some people in your community that your group can seek to bless on an ongoing basis?**
- **What are some ways you can share with others the blessings of faith in Christ this week?**

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Genesis 12

When we read from Genesis 11 into Genesis 12, we might be startled to read “Abram” instead of “Nahor” in the first verse. After all, Nahor had children. Abram, along with his barren wife, was certainly an unorthodox choice to carry on the promise of a son who will crush the head of the serpent (3:15). God eventually blessed Abram (later Abraham) with a son, Isaac. But then he had a barren wife too. When God blessed him with two sons, they turned out to be a man enslaved by his passions and a deceiver willing to split his family out of greed. Then Jacob, the deceiver but chosen son to carry on the promise, had twelve sons who bickered with and betrayed one another, even lying to their father that one of his sons had died. When it comes to God forming a great nation, He could seem rather inept. But earthly prosperity is often swifter than spiritual blessing, and God’s primary concern is the latter.

We can find great comfort in who God chose as the early fathers of the nation He was establishing. They were unorthodox, undeserving, and unlikely men to play such pivotal roles in His story of redemption. But so are we. If you ever feel unworthy or the least likely candidate for the task you’ve been given, then you’re in good company. God often chooses the least likely candidate. His choices need not pass the eye test!



How are you feeling unworthy right now? How does the gospel address those feelings?



Voices from the Church

“The blessings of God were not restricted to Abram and those who were good to him, but were to flow from him to *all peoples on earth*. This is the first hint of God’s ultimate purpose for Abram and his descendants.”²

—Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

Day 2: Read Genesis 13–14

The account of Abram and Melchizedek at the end of Genesis 14 is perplexing. Melchizedek seems to come out of nowhere and is referred to as the king of Salem and a priest of God. But after this brief encounter where he blesses Abram and Abram gives him a tenth of everything, this important man disappears from the pages of Genesis. So who was Melchizedek?

The name Melchizedek does resurface later in Scripture, in Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5–7, which reveal that Jesus was a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Based on this, and the possible Hebrew word play of “king of Salem” and “king of peace,” many conclude that Melchizedek was a theophany—an appearance of God in human form. This would also explain the blessing Melchizedek extended and the tithe he received.

Whether Melchizedek was indeed a theophany or merely a mysterious man sent by God, we cannot miss God’s heart for Abram in this moment. God reached out to Abram in his moment of victory to encourage him and remind him who truly delivered his enemies into his hand—God Most High.



How has God met you in the valleys and the mountains of your life to draw you to Him?

Day 3: Read Genesis 15

We can surely relate with Abram in his moment of doubt and frustration. We have all been there. It’s easy for us to think that God is making the wrong decisions at times and that we need to help Him out. And what makes this even more challenging is when we see others around us experiencing the blessings we crave. It’s tough for an infertile couple seeing all of their friends getting pregnant or having babies. Likewise, it is hard for singles to see their friends falling in love and getting married. Or for a couple in an apartment seeing their peers buying homes. Or to see everyone else’s careers taking off.

We can’t help it. We look at what God is doing around us and we always seem to be behind the curve. So we try to “help” God. But God is not looking for our help; He is looking for our humility. He wants us to wait on Him, in faith, knowing that He is good and believing in His promises.



In what areas of your life do you need to wait on God?

Day 4: Read Genesis 16

As we read from Genesis 15 into Genesis 16, we are thrown a curveball. Right on the heels of Abram's belief in the Lord and God's solemn covenant ceremony, we read of Sarai's plan for Abram to have a son with her handmaiden, Hagar. She shared her plan, and then Scripture merely records, "And Abram agreed to what Sarai said" (v. 2).

When Hagar became pregnant, Sarai became bitter and jealous, and she mistreated her servant, so much so that Hagar ran away for a time. But the consequences of Abram and Sarai's act of doubt and disobedience did not end with the strife in their immediate family. The descendants of Ishmael, her son, plagued the Israelites long after (v. 12).

Abram and Sarai failed to consider that their actions were not performed in a bubble. They carried over to impact many others. The same is true of us. We need to take care to consider whom we might bless by our obedience and whom we might hurt by our disobedience.



How might the decisions you are facing right now impact others around you?

Day 5: Read Genesis 17

Don't miss the timing of God giving Abram his new name—this was *before* Isaac was born. At this point, Abram was the father of one son, born to Hagar, his wife's slave. Imagine Abram going to the well the following day and encountering some of the men there. Their response to his new name might have sounded something like this: *"So let's get this straight. Calling you Abram, 'exalted father,' when you have one son by your wife's slave isn't enough. Now you want us to call you Abraham, 'father of a multitude?'"*

That could not have been easy for Abraham. But perhaps that was God's point. Perhaps God *wanted* Abraham to have these conversations, forcing him to explain to others what God had promised and what he was believing in. It's one thing to praise God for what He has done; it's something else to trust Him for what He has yet to do. But that is where we see our faith stretch and grow and where we have the opportunity to show others what faith looks like.



How can you encourage others to trust in God through your trust in His promises?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God's covenant people are established with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4).
- God's covenant people are to trust His promises (Gen. 15:1-6).
- God's covenant people are to be set apart for His glory (Gen. 17:1-10).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



On what occasions this week have you been reminded of God's faithfulness to His purposes for His glory and your good?



In what ways can we as Christians bless others tangibly and in view of God's promises to Abraham?

Notes
