

*“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 12:3 ESV

Reminder that
OUR LIVES ARE
meant to be lived as
a blessing for others

MAY 2015

*“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 12:3 ESV

COVENANT EFC

2015 Memory Focus

FROM GENESIS (ESV)

JANUARY

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

FEBRUARY

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God
He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

MARCH

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:28

APRIL

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 6:5

MAY

“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:3

JUNE

“Far be it from You to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death 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?”

Genesis 18:25

JULY

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.”

Genesis 22:2

AUGUST

“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.”

Genesis 32:10

SEPTEMBER

And there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

Genesis 35:7

OCTOBER

“He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

Genesis 39:9

NOVEMBER

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Genesis 49:10

DECEMBER

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Genesis 50:20

Foreword

BY SENIOR
PASTORS

2015

marks our Jubilee Year as a nation. God is the ultimate reason for Singapore's 50 years of peace and prosperity, safety and security, shalom and success. Indeed God alone deserves all praise, honour and thanksgiving for all the blessings from above!

Jubilee has been called a super-Sabbath. God is looking for devoted disciples who flee from *clamour, hurry and crowds* and cultivate the habit of abiding in God's Word, delighting in God's will and walking in God's way. Those who are intentional about a stronger foundation, a closer walk and a deeper life. Those who are tired of their hit-and-run, hide-and-see, touch-and-go relationship with Him. This Jubilee Year, will you intentionally and zealously commit yourself to be among the first fruits of this new Jubilee generation by scheduling personal time alone with God?

Psalm 1:2-3 speaks of the blessed person as one whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers".

The Psalmist finds great joy in relating to the Word of God...

He meditates upon the Word when day comes and when night falls...

Far beyond outward prosperity, the Psalmist desires the inward prosperity of his soul...

We invite you to take this year to grow deeper in faith and in His Word. Deal decisively with distractions in your life. Cut yourself off from habits and modern gadgets that displace communion with God. Fast from social media. Overhaul your schedule. Remove activities that desensitise you to the gentle promptings of the Spirit.

There is a dailyness in discipleship – soaking daily in His Word, applying His truth, reaping the fruits and passing them on.

Some years ago when Jerry Bridges was in Singapore, he talked about encountering God daily in the Word and especially the Gospel. When asked what it was like, Jerry said, "God always shows up."

What an assurance! This Jubilee Year 2015, draw near to Him. Linger in His presence. Allow Him to refresh you, renew you and restore you – a people prepared for the Day of His Visitation.

Jesus is Our Jubilee!

Ps Tony Yeo and Ps Tan Kay Kiong

God is looking for devoted disciples who flee from *clamour, hurry and crowds* and cultivate the habit of abiding in God's Word, delighting in God's will and walking in God's way.

Guide to Using This Devotional Journal

1 Prepare your heart in God's presence

- Select a fixed time (preferably in the morning before you begin your day) and a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Observe a moment of silence as you acknowledge God's presence. Centre down.
- Begin with a song of worship. Meditate on the lyrics even if you are unfamiliar with the tune. (Refer to the list of worship songs provided.)
- Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

The English Standard Version (ESV) is the default Bible version unless otherwise specified.

2 Allow God to S.O.A.P. you with His Word and Spirit

- **Scripture** – *Take your time to meditate on the Scripture passage for the day. Pause and mull over words and phrases that stand out to you.*

- **Observation** – *Jot down significant insights and reflections from the passage you have read. You can use the guiding questions provided.*

What's New in 2015?

A "Deeper Reflection" section has been introduced to aid your contemplation of the Scripture. It is not to replace your own observation, for the Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture to you as you seek Him earnestly.

- **Application** – *Note down a specific and practical commitment to God's Word for you. Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow or a principle to live out? Where appropriate, share your devotional entry with someone.*

- **Prayer** – *Bring your heartfelt response to God in prayer.*

What's New in 2015?

- Suggested prayers are included twice weekly to serve as an aid to those who may find them helpful in their prayer response.
- On Sundays, you may want to meditate on the Psalms, the Gospel or the Scripture passage of the sermon. This may be followed by reviewing and reflecting on the past week and then responding in prayer. Examining your life is essential in your faith journey as a redeemed disciple of Christ.

May/June
2015

Worship Songs

BENEDICTION

Verse 1

May the Lord bless you and keep you
May the Lord smile on you
Shine His light upon you
May the Lord lift you
Turn His face towards you
Give you His peace, give you His peace

Verse 2

May the Lord bless us and keep us
May the Lord smile on us
Shine His light upon us
May the Lord lift us
Turn His face towards us
Give us His peace, give us His peace

Chorus

Blessed we came to this place today
And blessed now we will go
In the name of the Father, the Spirit and the Son
(Repeat)

Ending

Go now in peace
Go now in peace

Words & Music: Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman

Year & Publisher: © 2013 Said And Done Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))

sixsteps Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))

Thankyou Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))

worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))

SHOUT! Music Publishing

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AMAZING GRACE MY CHAINS ARE GONE

Verse 1

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see

Verse 2

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

Chorus

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains
Unending love, Amazing Grace

Verse 3

The Lord has promised good to me
His Word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

Verse 4

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, who call'd me here below
Will be forever mine

Words & Music: Chris Tomlin | John Newton | Louie Giglio

Year & Publisher: © 2006 sixsteps Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing);

Vamos Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing); worshiptogether.com songs

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MIGHTY TO SAVE

Verse 1

Everyone needs compassion
 Love that's never failing
 Let mercy fall on me
 Everyone needs forgiveness
 The kindness of a Saviour
 The hope of nations

Chorus

Saviour, He can move the mountains
 My God is mighty to save
 He is mighty to save
 Forever, Author of salvation
 He rose and conquered the grave
 Jesus conquered the grave

Verse 2

So take me as You find me
 All my fears and failures
 Fill my life again
 I give my life to follow
 Everything I believe in
 Now I surrender

Bridge

Shine your light and let the whole world see
 We're singing
 For the glory of the risen King Jesus
 Shine your light and let the whole world see
 We're singing
 For the glory of the risen King

Words & Music: Ben Fielding | Reuben Morgan
Year & Publisher: © 2006 Hillsong Music Publishing
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BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD (HOUR OF PRAYER)

Verse 1

Before the Throne of God above
 I have a strong and perfect plea
 A great high priest whose name is Love
 Who ever lives and pleads for me
 My name is graven on His hands
 My name is written on His heart
 I know that while in Heaven He stands
 No tongue can bid me thence depart

Verse 2

When Satan tempts me to despair
 And tells me of the guilt within
 Upward I look and see Him there
 Who made an end of all my sin
 Because the sinless Saviour died
 My sinful soul is counted free
 For God the just is satisfied
 To look on Him and pardon me

Verse 3

Before Him there the risen Lamb
 My perfect spotless righteousness
 The great unchangeable I Am
 The King of glory and of grace
 One in Himself I cannot die
 My soul is purchased by His blood
 My life is hid with Christ on high
 With Christ my Saviour and my God

Words & Music: Charitie Lees Bancroft | William Batchelder Bradbury

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MY REDEEMER LIVES

Verse

I know He rescued my soul
 His blood has covered my sin
 I believe, I believe
 My shame He's taken away
 My pain is healed in His name
 I believe, I believe

Pre-Chorus

I'll raise a banner
 'Cause my Lord has conquered the grave

Chorus

My Redeemer lives
 My Redeemer lives
 My Redeemer lives
 My Redeemer lives

Bridge

You lift my burdens
 I'll rise with You
 I'm dancing on this mountaintop
 To see Your Kingdom come

Words and Music: Reuben Morgan

Year & Publisher: © 1998 Hillsong Music Publishing

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OUR GOD SAVES

Verse

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son
 In the name of the Spirit, Lord we come
 We're gather'd together to lift up Your name
 To call on our Saviour to fall on Your grace
 Hear the joyful sound of our offering
 As Your saints bow down, as Your people sing
 We will rise with You, lifted on Your wings
 And the world will see that

Chorus

Our God saves, our God saves
 There is hope in Your name
 Mourning turns to songs of praise
 Our God saves, our God saves

Words & Music: Brenton Brown | Paul Baloche

Year & Publisher: © 2007 Integrity's Hosanna! Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.); Leadworship Songs (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.); Thankyou Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)

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CHRIST IS ENOUGH

Verse 1

Christ is my reward and all of my devotion
 Now there's nothing in this world
 That could ever satisfy
 Through every trial my soul will sing
 No turning back I've been set free

Chorus

Christ is enough for me
 Christ is enough for me
 Everything I need is in You
 Everything I need

Verse 2

Christ, my all in all, the joy of my salvation
 And this hope will never fail
 Heaven is our home
 Through every storm my soul will sing
 Jesus is here, to God be the glory

Bridge

I have decided to follow Jesus
 No turning back no turning back
 The cross before me the world behind me
 No turning back no turning back

Words & Music: Jonas Myrin | Reuben Morgan
Year & Publisher: © 2012 Hillsong Music Publishing
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AND CAN IT BE

Verse 1

And can it be that I should gain
 An interest in the Savior's blood!
 Died He for me? Who caused His pain!
 For me who Him to death pursued

Chorus

Amazing love! How can it be
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
 Amazing love! How can it be
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Verse 2

'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies!
 Who can explore His strange design?
 In vain the firstborn Seraph tries
 To sound the depths of love divine
 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore
 Let angel minds inquire no more
 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore
 Let angel minds inquire no more

Verse 3

He left his Father's throne above
 (so free, so infinite his grace!)
 Emptied himself of all but love
 And bled for Adam's helpless race
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free
 For O my God, it found out me!
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free
 For O my God, it found out me!

AND CAN IT BE (CONT'D)

Verse 4

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night
 thine eye diffused a quickening ray
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light
 My chains fell off, my heart was free
 I rose, went forth, and followed thee
 My chains fell off, my heart was free
 I rose, went forth, and followed thee

Verse 5

No condemnation now I dread
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine
 Alive in Him, my living Head
 And clothed in righteousness divine
 Bold I approach th' eternal throne
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own
 Bold I approach th' eternal throne
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own

Words & Music: Charles Wesley | Thomas Campbell

Year & Publisher: © Words: Public Domain

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KEEP ON PRAYING

Chorus

Keep on praying in the Spirit
 Keep on praying in the Spirit
 At all times with all kinds of prayers
 Ephesians six eighteen says
 Keep on praying

Verse

Keeping this in mind
 Stay sharp in the Spirit
 Praying all the time
 For the people of God

Words & Music: Ramon Pink

*Year & Publisher: © 1989 Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Admin. by
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IN CHRIST ALONE

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found
 He is my light, my strength, my song
 This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
 Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
 What heights of love, what depths of peace
 When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
 My Comforter, my All in All
 Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
 Fullness of God in helpless babe
 This gift of love and righteousness
 Scorned by the ones He came to save
 Till on that cross as Jesus died
 The wrath of God was satisfied
 For every sin on Him was laid
 Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
 Light of the world by darkness slain
 Then bursting forth in glorious Day
 Up from the grave He rose again
 And as He stands in victory
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
 For I am His and He is mine
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life, no fear in death
 This is the power of Christ in me
 From life's first cry to final breath
 Jesus commands my destiny
 No power of hell, no scheme of man
 Can ever pluck me from His hand
 Till He returns or calls me home
 Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Words & Music: Keith Getty | Stuart Townend

Year & Publisher: © 2001 Thankyou Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))

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The Church Beyond

■ FOCUS OF THE MONTH:

BI-VOCATIONAL MISSIONS

Traditionally, missionaries are viewed as “full-timers” who uproot themselves from their home nations to live in another country for the purpose of church planting or missions work in general. These missionaries usually have to give up their secular jobs to “focus” on God’s work. While some people may be called to do this, there are many others whom God has called to remain in their current jobs or stations in life and to **intentionally** contribute to cross-cultural missions – people who have the God-given grace to balance their secular responsibilities with missions work.

In Covenant EFC, we use the term “bi-vocational missionaries” (bi-vocs) to identify them. **A bi-voc has a specific calling to a vocation, as well as to cross-cultural missions.** These saints are no less spiritual or less focused than the full-time missionaries, but have differing gifts, calling, roles and time commitments. God views them as one team, bringing in **one** harvest, to the **one and only, true** God, who is the Lord of the Harvest!

The vision of Covenant EFC Missions is to plant **1,000 disciple-making church plants (DCPs)** and to raise up at least **500 missionaries** to do this work. This is a **big** vision! It requires a lot of manpower, finances, skills and sacrifice. That’s why only a **big** God can make such a vision come to pass. He will provide what we need. **Bi-vocs are part of God’s provision to bring in the harvest.** They will make up about 70 to 80 percent (or 350 to 400 missionaries) or more of God’s harvest force. God will use their spiritual gifts, hearts, abilities and experiences to support the work of missions.

Covenant EFC has been training **93 potential bi-vocs.** After the training, we desire **every person** to serve in missions in the capacity they are able to. Some will serve as volunteers and others will serve

as bi-vocs, aiding in the vision that God has given Covenant EFC Missions. That’s 93 trained people who have potentially been added to the Harvest Force in the last two years or so! **God is answering prayer!**

The Devil is not happy about this and releases his darts of discouragement to quench our faith. That’s why intentional prayer is important to help remove the mountains of doubt and pave the way for God to work.

PRAY

When we pray, we put our **faith** in the bigness of our God and not the bigness of the task. The great preacher, D. L. Moody, said, “Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.” Let us humbly kneel before God and in faith ask Him to:

- Train and place at least 24 bi-vocs by the end of 2015.
- Train and place at least 100 bi-vocs by 2020 (about 20 per year).
- To move every person who goes through the bi-vocational missionary training to be intentional in contributing their time, efforts and talents to missions.
- Pray for our existing 16 bi-vocs and 68 trainees.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labour.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:7-8

“Our praying, however, needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied and a courage which never fails.”

E.M. BOUNDS

May 1
Friday
2015

Journeying through Disorientation: God Is Present

■ Scripture

Genesis 15:12-17

■ Observation

What do you observe about the manifestation of God's presence to Abraham in verses 12 to 17 (note vv. 12, 17)?

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Deeper Reflection

Sandwiching the Word of God that predicts the sufferings of Abraham's descendants (v. 13) and promises God's salvation of them (vv. 14-16) is the presence of God with Abraham (vv. 12, 17). We must not miss the significant theological connection between God's Word and God's presence here. God's **fearsome** presence: "a deep, frightening darkness engulfed"¹ Abraham (v. 12). The Hebrew word for "frightening" "reflects a human emotion that is inspired most often by Yahweh's presence"². Abraham "experiences fear in the presence of God"³ – like Adam (Ge 3:10), Jacob (Ge 28:17), Moses (Ex 3:6). God's **faithful** presence: "a smoking firepot and a flaming torch" (v. 17, NLT) is "a manifestation of God"⁴, like the pillar of cloud and fire of God's presence with Israel in Exodus (Ex 13:21-22); which "pass between the halves of the carcasses" (v. 17, NLT) – signifying God's covenant faithfulness in fulfilling His Word to Abraham. As we wait on God to fulfil His Word for us in our disorientation, we can rest in "deep sleep" in His presence (v. 12). We can sleep in God's presence with security like the psalmist (Ps 3:5-6; 4:8; cf. Mk 4:38).

■ Application

What does it mean to me to walk in the presence of God in my times of disorientation?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1990), 428
² Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 434
³ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 434
⁴ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1976), 125

May 2
Saturday
2015

Journeying through Disorientation: Staying with God

■ Scripture

Genesis 15:1-6, 13-16

■ Observation

How does Abraham live out God's calling (vv. 1, 6, 13, 15) in the light of the fact that God's promises to him would not be fulfilled in his lifetime (vv. 5, 13-14, 16)?

Deeper Reflection

In Abraham's journey of disorientation, God called him to a four-fold reorientation. "**Do not fear**" (v. 1), because of what God is to us: "I am a shield to you" (v. 1). Notice the highly personal "I am" and intimate "to you". The Hebrew noun "shield" is a progression from its verbal form, "delivered", in Genesis 14:20. As God has been faithful in protecting and delivering us in the past, He will continue to do so in the present and the future. "Do not fear", because of what God will give us: "your reward shall be very great" (v. 1). In our trials when we "have need of endurance", we will receive God's promise of "a great reward" when we "have done the will of God" (Heb 10:35-36). **Believe in God**: Abraham "believed in the LORD" according to His Word (vv. 4-6). While nothing may have changed in our circumstances, like Abraham, we have the unchanging Word of the unchanging God – and that alone we hold on to. "**Know for sure**" (v. 13a): Know that what God has spoken will come to pass (vv. 13b-14). That's how we are to know God's Word: to know with certain certainty. "**As for you**" (v. 15a): God's distinctive plan for Abraham. Abraham will not live to see God's promises to him fulfilled (vv. 15b-16, cf. Jn 21:20-22).

■ Application

What should I do when I am not sure what God's plan is for my life, or when I do not know when God will fulfil His promises in His Word?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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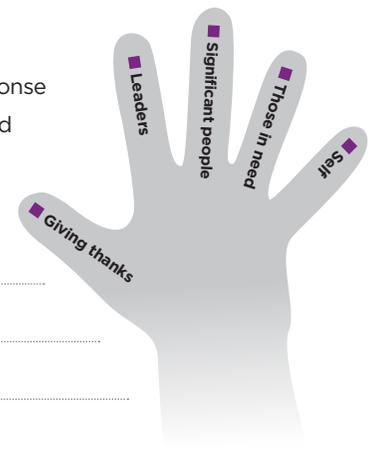
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May 3
Sunday
2015

■ **Scripture**

■ **Observation**
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■ **Application**
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■ **Prayer**
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The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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REFLECT

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
May 2015 - Week 1

BOUNTIFUL PROMISES

God gives us bountiful promises which bless those who trust in Him.

Scripture - Psalm 103

1. Activity Bite

Read Psalm 103. For easier reading, try the New International Reader's Version (NIRV) which is available online. Look for God's promises. Write each promise on a sticky note and stick it on your body.

2. Chat Time

- Q1: How many promises can you find in Psalm 103?
- Q2: Why does God want to bless His people with so many promises?
- Q3: How should we respond to God who gives us these promises?

3. Learning Point

The Bible has thousands of promises from God. These can be promises of good health, loving relationships, a fantastic future, belongings, protection and many more. God gave them to us by His goodness. It wasn't because we earned them through good works or good behaviour. We must receive them by faith and trust that God will continue to keep His promises in both good and bad times.

4. Action Point

Look through all the promises that were written on the sticky notes. Think of a few people who will benefit from these promises and pass the notes to them. Use this as a starting point to share about God's love.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)
Thank You, God, for all Your bountiful promises and I receive them with gladness. Help me share this wonderful news with someone who really needs to know Your love. Amen.

May 5
Tuesday
2015

“I Will Give Him to the Lord”

■ Scripture

1 Samuel 1:9-11

■ Observation

What do you observe about Hannah in her prayer to God in verses 9 to 11?

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Deeper Reflection

Central to Hannah’s life at this point is “the LORD had closed her womb” (1 Sa 1:5, 6). We can say that was God’s will for Hannah. But Hannah, apparently, did not consider her barrenness as such nor did she want to accept it, because she “prayed to the LORD” to change her situation (v. 10). She had been suffering this pain for years, as implied by the “year after year” in verse 7. So, it could be that this was the first time she prayed to God concerning this, or she had been praying for years but this was the first time she made a vow to God (v. 11). Whichever the case, what drove Hannah to pray was her unbearable pain (“greatly distressed” and “wept bitterly”, v. 10), asking God to “look on” her “affliction” (v. 11). Hannah did not ask God for a son **because** she wanted to dedicate a son to God, but rather, she would fully dedicate her son to God, if God gave her a son. Oftentimes, we walk with God with mixed motives, but still deep inside us, we do want to genuinely say with Hannah, “I will give him to the LORD” (v. 11). And God knows that.

■ Application

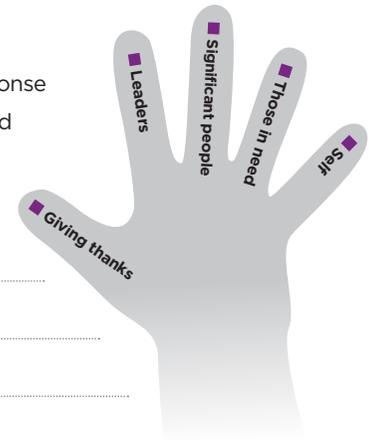
How will I deal with my mixed motives in what I have been asking God?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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May 6
Wednesday
2015

God Is in the Process

■ Scripture

1 Samuel 1:11-19

■ Observation

Why did Hannah seem to be assured that God would answer her prayer (vv. 17-18)?

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Deeper Reflection

God had a purpose in mind for closing Hannah’s womb, but Hannah did not know that, for God did not tell her. Her “affliction” drove her to plead with God for a son with a vow (1 Sa 1:11). Hannah’s “motives may have been mixed, but her request was in line with the overarching will of God, who was preparing to bring into the world a man who would be his faithful representative and mouthpiece”⁷ – Samuel. But God’s purpose became clear only years later when Samuel “was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD” (1 Sa 3:19-20). We do not know if Hannah lived to see that. Until then, God was in the process of working towards that purpose, which included the “affliction” Hannah suffered for years. God assured Hannah through Eli that her prayer would be answered – not just the son she asked for, but a son to be fully dedicated to God (vv. 17-18), which reflects Hannah’s heart towards God. God may or may not answer our prayers when He “closes our womb” according to His purpose, which oftentimes is not clear to us. But God is in the process of working it out (cf. Eph 1:11), if we just keep walking with Him.

■ Application

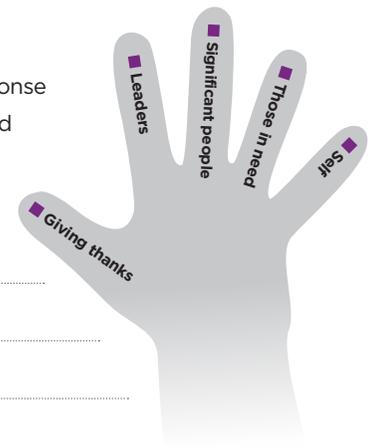
In what area(s) of my life is God in the process of working towards His purposes, and how do I move on from here?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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⁷ Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1988), 50

May 7
Thursday
2015

The Dominant Theme of Worship

■ Scripture

1 Samuel 1:1-28

■ Observation

How is worship presented as the dominant theme in the lives of Elkanah and Hannah in verses 1 to 28?

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Deeper Reflection

The dominant theme of the lives of Elkanah and Hannah is worship. The story of Hannah’s pain of having her womb closed by God (1 Sa 1:4-6), Peninnah’s constant provocation of Hannah (vv. 6-7), and Hannah’s petition to God for a son (vv. 9-18), begins and ends with the theme of worship to God (vv. 3, 19). Here’s a picture of a life enveloped by worship to God, no matter what. Despite her pains, Hannah was persistent in her worship to God: she continued to go up “to the house of the LORD” “year after year” (v. 7). Even what Hannah asked from God was itself worship: “I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life” (v. 11). It was worship in the state of being “greatly distressed” as she “wept bitterly” (v. 10). When Samuel was born (v. 20), the story continues – beginning with the offering of sacrifice to God (v. 21) and ending with dedication and worship (v. 28). Worship will be the dominant theme of our lives when what undergirds, overarches and encompasses our lives is God – the God who closes our womb (vv. 5-6), who remembers us (v. 19), who grants us our petitions (v. 27) and who fulfils His purposes “in due time” (v. 20).

■ Application

How can I grow in making worship to God the dominant theme of my life?

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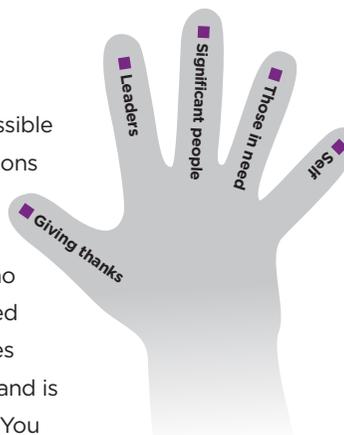
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■ Prayer

Oh, how great are Your riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand Your decisions and Your ways! For who can know the thoughts of God? Who knows enough to give You advice? And who has given You so much that You need to pay it back? For everything comes from You and exists by Your power and is intended for Your glory. All glory to You forever! Amen.⁸



⁸ Adapted from Romans 11:33-36 (NLT)

May 8
Friday
2015

The Husband of Hannah

■ Scripture

1 Samuel 1:7-8, 21-23

■ Observation

What do you observe about Elkanah as a husband in verses 7 to 8 and 21 to 23?

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Deeper Reflection

In 1 Samuel 1, Elkanah spoke only twice and both times to his wife. There are lessons husbands can learn in relating with their wives here. Elkanah asked his wife three “why” questions: “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted?” (v. 8, NIV). The questions imply that Hannah should not be weeping, should be eating and should not be downhearted. At the heart of the “why” is “I just don’t understand you.” But that’s exactly the problem; “we guys are clueless about understanding women.”⁹ And it doesn’t help to say, “Am I not better to you than ten sons?” No, Elkanah. “Don’t apply a Band-Aid to the wound. Get her to talk about it some more.”¹⁰ What a wife needs is appreciation of what she is going through. But acceptance precedes **appreciation**. Scripture tells husbands: “live with your wives in an understanding way”, and remember that “she is a woman” (1 Pe 3:7). When Hannah told Elkanah that she would go to the temple only after her son was weaned (vv. 21-22), his reply was, “Do what seems best to you (not “to me!”) (v. 23). This husband was giving his wife **affirmation**.

■ Application

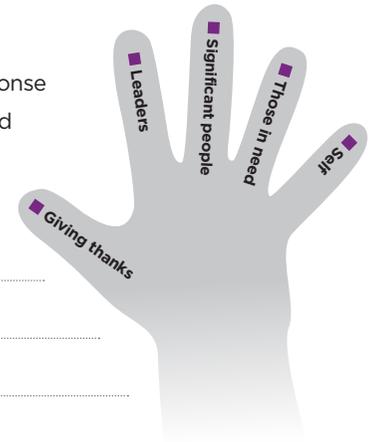
How can I relate with my wife/husband better in light of the Scripture telling husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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⁹ John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone* (SPCK, 2011), 6
¹⁰ John Goldingay, 6

May 9
Saturday
2015

The Highest, the Haughty, the Humble

■ Scripture

1 Samuel 2:1-10

■ Observation

What does Hannah's praise to God in verses 1 to 10 tell us about God and humans?

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Deeper Reflection

1 Samuel 2:1-10 is praise to God from a mother who has come to know the God who both closes and opens the womb, which gives perspective for living in the world. What our eyes see in the world today is this: it is dominated by haughty humans, "the wicked ones", who think that one prevails by human power and they can "oppose the Lord" (vv. 9, 10). "Boast no more so very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth" (v. 3), warns the Lord, the Highest of all, who "brings death and makes alive...brings down to the grave and raises up... sends poverty and wealth... humbles and exalts" (vv. 6-7, NIV). The God who knows all things and weighs the deeds of every human (v. 3) will one day silence, shatter and judge the haughty ones (vv. 9, 10). Meanwhile, God's humble people may be "feeble", "hungry", "barren", "poor" and "needy" (vv. 4, 5, 8). But we will not suffer such conditions forever, for God will bring about a reversal of fortunes (vv. 4, 5, 8). And we can say, "My heart exults in the Lord, in the Lord I now hold my head high" (v. 1, REB¹¹), as God "will guard the feet of His faithful servants" (v. 9, NIV).

■ Application

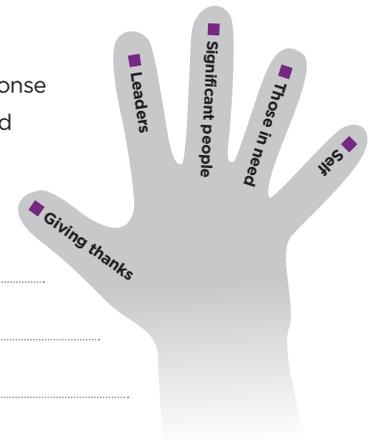
How do I live in today's world with the perspectives about God and humans in verses 1 to 10?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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¹¹ Revised English Bible

May 10
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

REFLECT

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
May 2015 - Week 2

MOTHER'S DAY

Obey and honour our mothers because it is pleasing to God.

Scripture - Isaiah 49:15

1. Activity Bite

Search Youtube for "chicks under mother hen's wings" and watch how a mother hen protects her chicks.

2. Chat Time

- Q1:** What are some interesting things you discovered from watching the video?
- Q2:** What are the dangers that the mother hen puts herself into by protecting her chicks? Why would she do that?
- Q3:** In what ways does our earthly mother protect and care for us?

3. Learning Point

God created mothers to take care of us. A mother's love for her children is incredibly deep and can never be broken. That's why mothers can be so sacrificial in what they do for their children. God commands us to obey and honour our mothers. They may ask us to do things that we don't like but it is for our own good. They know better than us. So it is a good thing to appreciate them always.

4. Action Point

Our mothers love to hear how we appreciate them. Write down ten things that you appreciate about your mother on a Mother's Day card. Read out what you have written when you pass the card to her and give her a big hug.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)
God, I want to thank You for giving me a wonderful mother. I pray that You will continue to bless her and bring her closer to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

May 11
Monday
2015

“Yes, God Has Said, But...”

■ Scripture

Genesis 16:1-3

■ Observation

How does the narrator describe Sarah specifically in verses 1 to 3?

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Deeper Reflection

Genesis 16:1-6 must be viewed in light of Chapter 15, which is filled primarily with one thing: the Word of God. In Genesis 15, God had spoken to Abraham most clearly and concretely thus far, concerning His purpose, plan and promise for his life – present and future. Genesis 16:1-6 is filled with purely human actions. God is totally out of the picture. Notice Sarah’s progressive human actions in verses 1 to 3. What Sarah saw about her condition (“Now, behold”, v. 2) might be right observation, but her interpretation and conclusion was wrong in light of God’s Word. But Sarah had the human ability – she “had an Egyptian maid” (v. 1). So, with that she pressurised¹² Abraham into action (v. 2); she “took” Hagar and “gave” her to him (v. 3). The problem in verses 1 to 3 can be summed up as “Yes, God has said, but...” For us, it may be “Yes, God has said; but I can’t wait anymore. I must do something.” Or, “Yes, God has said, but maybe I can help God out, since He didn’t tell me how it’s going to happen.” Or, “Yes, God has said, but I want my way.” Am I more inclined to walk by sight rather than by faith in God’s Word (2 Co 5:7)?

■ Application

How can I go about walking by faith in areas of my life where I have the tendency to walk by sight?

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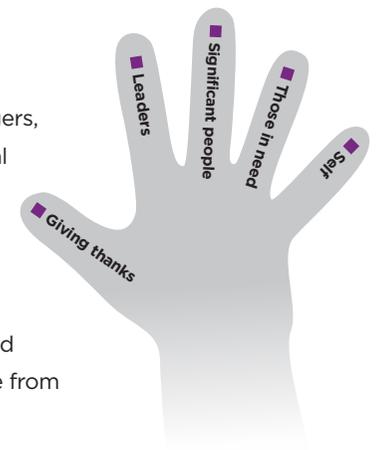
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■ Prayer

Grant, O God, that amidst all the discouragements, difficulties, dangers, distress and darkness of this mortal life, I may believe in, rely on and trust in Your unchanging abiding living Word, and build my hopes on this, as on a sure foundation. Be gracious and merciful to me, and strengthen my faith and deliver me from despair. Amen.



¹² “Domestic pressure”, Derek Kidner, 126

May 12
Tuesday
2015

Whose Voice Do I Listen To?

■ Scripture

Genesis 15:1-4 and 16:1-3

■ Observation

What are the parallels do you observe between verses 1 to 4 and Genesis 16:1-3?

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Deeper Reflection

The four sets of parallels (three similarities and one contrast) between verses 1 to 4 and Genesis 16:1-3 are very telling. First, a problem: Abraham said to God, "I am childless" (v. 2), and "Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children" (Ge 16:1a). Then, a potential solution to the problem: Abraham considered "Eliezer of Damascus" to be "the heir of my house" (v. 2), and Sarah "had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar" (Ge 16:1b). Then, a proposal as the solution: Abraham said to God, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir" (v. 3), and Sarah said to Abraham, "the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid" (Ge 16:2a). And now comes the contrast, which is pivotal: in response to Abraham "the word of the LORD came to him" (v. 4), and in response to Sarah "Abram listened to the voice of his wife" (Ge 16:2b). The discipleship challenge here is: Whose voice do I listen to? God had spoken to Abraham clearly and concretely, but he "listened to the voice of his wife". "It is ironical that after the heights attained"¹³ in Genesis 14 and 15, Abraham stumbled so badly. Do I see this Abraham in the mirror?

■ Application

What are the voices that contradict the voice of God that I need to keep myself from listening to?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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¹³ Derek Kidner, 126

May 13
Wednesday
2015

When We Make Mistakes: The Human Side

■ Scripture

Genesis 16:1-6

■ Observation

What does the narrative in verses 1 to 6 teach us about making mistakes?

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Deeper Reflection

We may sum up verses 1 to 6 as making mistakes. The mistake of Abraham and Sarah was taking things into their own hands instead of trusting God (vv. 1-3), which resulted in displaying “untruth that is part of sin”¹⁴. Hagar showed “false pride”¹⁵ in despising her mistress (v. 4), perhaps because “she had been made to feel inferior”¹⁶ at Sarah’s hands. Sarah showed “false blame”¹⁷: “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering” (v. 5, NIV) – her first reaction, so incongruent and unfair. Twice Sarah mentioned God’s name, but in the wrong way. First, she “placed the blame on the Lord for her barrenness”¹⁸ (v. 2). Then, her “outburst closes with what is virtually a curse: ‘May the LORD judge between you and me’ (v. 5; cf. 1 Sa 24:12, 15)”¹⁹. And Abraham showed “false neutrality”²⁰ in passing the buck to Sarah (v. 6a). And Sarah “humiliated”²¹ Hagar, and “so intolerable was her suffering”²² that she ran away (v. 6b). The mistakes made snowballed into “total disaster for all concerned”²³, with the problems and pains still hanging in the air.

■ Application

How does the story of Abraham and Sarah making mistakes challenge me personally?

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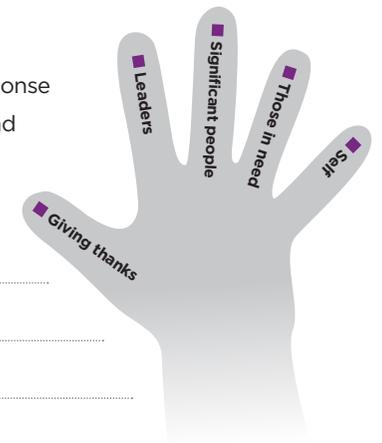
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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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¹⁴ Derek Kidner, 126
¹⁵ Derek Kidner, 126
¹⁶ D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis, The Preacher’s Commentary* (Nelson, 1987), 141
¹⁷ Derek Kidner, 126
¹⁸ Alan P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Baker, 1998, 1996), 319
¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson, 1994), Vol. 2, 8
²⁰ Derek Kidner, 126
²¹ Gordon J. Wenham, 9
²² Gordon J. Wenham, 9
²³ Gordon J. Wenham, 9

May 15
Friday
2015

God in Our Painful Lostness (1)

■ Scripture

Genesis 16:6-9

■ Observation

What do you learn about God in verses 6 to 9?

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Deeper Reflection

Sarah's harsh mistreatment of Hagar forced her to flee "from her presence" (v. 6). Her flight was so sudden and unprepared for. So, here she was in her painful lostness "in the wilderness" (v. 7) – in which God reveals Himself to her. **The God who finds us:** "the angel of the LORD found her" (v. 7). It is instructive to note that "this narrative [vv. 6-14] does not mention prayer nor instruct a patient waiting on the Lord".²⁵ It is all about the divine initiative of grace. **The God who cares for us:** "Hagar...where have you come from and where are you going?" (v. 8a). A question filled with divine care, concern and compassion. "Where have you come from?" Hagar could answer (v. 8b), but as for "Where are you going?", Hagar had no idea. Lost. And it is here we see **the God who guides us:** "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority" (v. 9). It is a Word from God that must have been hard for Hagar to follow. When God guides us, it does not necessarily mean the journey will be smooth and successful (in human terms). Do I still want God's guidance if He guides me through a difficult path?

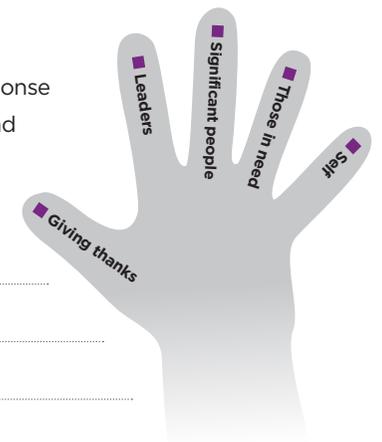
■ Application

Where is God in my life in times of painful lostness?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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²⁵ Alan P. Ross, 321

May 16
Saturday
2015

God in Our Painful Lostness (2)

■ Scripture

Genesis 16:10-14

■ Observation

What can you discover about God in verses 10 to 14?

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Deeper Reflection

In our painful lostness is the God who blesses us: “I will greatly multiply your descendants” (v. 10). In Genesis, “be fruitful and multiply” is divine blessing (1:28; 9:1). God’s Word, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority” (v. 9), that must have been hard for Hagar to follow, is accompanied by God’s promise of blessing. The hard way that God may guide us through is a blessed way. The God who hears us: “the LORD has heard your misery” (v. 11, NIV). Hagar did not cry out to God about her “misery”, but God “heard” it. When our pains are too deep to be expressed in words, God hears them. God hears our “misery” emotionally, deeply, intimately. The God who plans for us: facing an uncertain future, God revealed to Hagar His plan for her and the son she was bearing (vv. 11-12). Sometimes, God reveals to us His plans and purposes ahead of time, but oftentimes, He unfolds them moment by moment, step by step, as we faithfully follow His leading and guidance. The God who sees us: “You are a God who sees” (vv. 13-14). At all times – good and bad – we are constantly “under the caring gaze”²⁶ of our loving Heavenly Father.

■ Application

How do I see God in times when I am in painful lostness?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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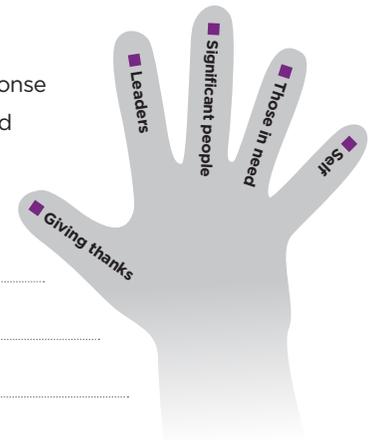
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²⁶ D. Stuart Briscoe, 143

May 17
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

May 18
Monday
2015

Relationship with God: Turning Points

■ Scripture

Genesis 17:1-3

■ Observation

What can you observe about God and Abraham in verses 1 to 3?

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Deeper Reflection

Genesis 17 is another turning point in Abraham's life. Turning points are divinely designed for deepening our relationship with God. Before reaching a turning point, we wait on God. Abraham was 99 years old when God "appeared to him" (v. 1). The last time God spoke to him was at least 13 years ago²⁷ in Genesis 15. Like Abraham, we wait on God by His Word. A turning point leads us to a deeper knowledge of God. Abraham came to know "God Almighty" (v. 1). This divine name appears for the first time in the Bible here, and also for Abraham. A new vision of God at a personal level with significance and relevance. El Shaddai, the Hebrew for "God Almighty", means "God who is sufficient"²⁸, emphasising on "[divine] might, particularly against the frailty of man. In Genesis, it tends to be matched to situations where God's servants are hard-pressed and needing assurance"²⁹ (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25). A turning point leads us to deeper devotion to God: "Walk in My presence and be blameless" (v. 1). God "wills no distant or half-hearted relationship"³⁰ with Him. And Abraham's prostration before God (v. 3a) "acknowledged the master-servant footing of the covenant."³¹

■ Application

How have the turning points in my life shaped my knowledge of God and my relationship with Him?

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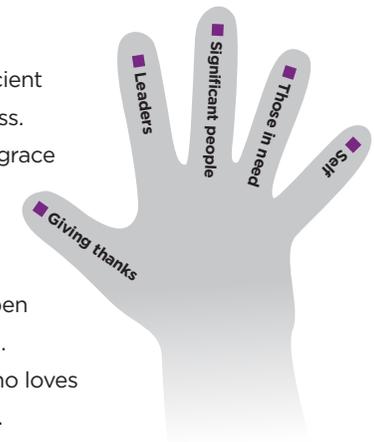
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■ Prayer

Almighty God, Your power is sufficient for me when I am weak and helpless. God of all grace, Your redemptive grace is sufficient for me when I fail You. The only wise God, Your infinite wisdom is sufficient for me when I am unsure or lost. Deepen my knowledge of You, eternal God. Strengthen my devotion to You who loves me with an everlasting love. Amen.



²⁷ At this point, Abraham was 99 years old; he was 86 when Ishmael was born (16:16) – 13 years before.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, 128

²⁹ Derek Kidner, 129

³⁰ Derek Kidner, 128

³¹ Derek Kidner, 128

May 19
Tuesday
2015

Relationship with God: New Name

■ **Scripture**

Genesis 17:4-6, 15-16

■ **Observation**

What does God giving Abraham and Sarah new names tell us about God (vv. 4-6, 15-16)?

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Deeper Reflection

In the turning point of Abraham's life, God gave him a new name, from "Abram" to "Abraham" (vv. 4-5), and also to his wife, from "Sarai" to "Sarah" (v. 15). Divinely designed turning points in our lives are transformation points. A new name points to the new person that God has moulded us into – inward maturation. God "is making Abraham a new man, with new powers spiritually engrafted. The new name is symbolic of his regeneration, with all the new possibilities this implies."³² A new name points to a new purpose that God has called us to – outward mission. For Abraham it was: "you shall be the father of a multitude of nations" (v. 4), and for Sarah, "the mother of nations" (v. 16). And "kings shall come from" them (vv. 6, 16). This new purpose "was certainly far in excess of anything Abraham in his wildest dreams would ever have imagined"³³ (Ge 17: 17). The new purpose God calls us to is of great significance, in whatever form as defined by God. And the "you shall be" (v. 4) is determined by "I will make you" (v. 5), "I will bless" and "I will give" (v. 16). It all rests on "I am God Almighty" (Ge 17:1).

■ **Application**

What is a "new name" that God has given me and what does it mean to me?

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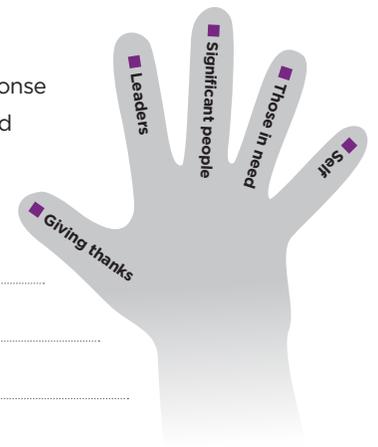
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■ **Prayer**

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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³² Joyce G. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1986), 65
³³ Joyce G. Baldwin, 65

May 20
Wednesday
2015

Covenant Relationship: The Human Part

■ Scripture

Genesis 17:1-2, 9-14, 22-27

■ Observation

What is the significance of God commanding Abraham to walk in obedience with Him for the first time (vv. 1-2) in His covenant relationship since Genesis 12?

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Deeper Reflection

The two stages of covenant-making between God and Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 show two sides of the one and same transaction. In Genesis 15, God required Abraham to just believe – and he did and God “counted him as righteous” (v. 6, NLT). But now in Genesis 17, God required him (“representing Israel”³⁴) to “walk before Me, and be blameless” (v. 1), which also means “keep My covenant” (v. 9) – covenant faithfulness, symbolised by circumcision as a reminder (vv. 10-14). It means “total obedience”, living “one’s entire life” where “every single step is made with reference to God and every day experiences Him close at hand”, in “wholeness of relationship and integrity rather than no sin [meaning to be ‘blameless’]”³⁵. Imputed righteousness (Ge 15:6; cf. Ro 4:3-5) must necessarily result in “expressed devotion”³⁶ (v. 1). The Gospel calls for “believe and obey” (Ro 1:5, GNB). We are made righteous in Christ through faith (Ro 5:1), and to live out that righteousness through obedience (Ro 6:17-19). True circumcision, equivalent to baptism (Col 2:11-12), is not outward but inward, “of the heart, by the Spirit” (Ro 2:28-29; cf. Lev 26:41; Dt 30:6; Jer 4:4).

■ Application

What does it mean to me to “believe and obey” in “true circumcision” in my relationship with God?

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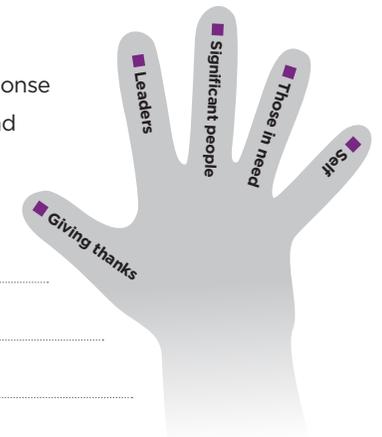
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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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³⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Zondervan, 2001), 259

³⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 259

³⁶ Derek Kidner, 128

May 21
Thursday
2015

Covenant Relationship: The Divine Part

■ Scripture

Genesis 17:1-8, 15-21

■ Observation

What do you observe about the divine part in the covenant relationship between God and Abraham in verses 1 to 8 and 15 to 21?

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Deeper Reflection

In this new stage of God's covenant relationship with Abraham, covenant obedience precedes covenant promise (vv. 1-2). Yet, we must not miss the predominant divine part in the covenant relationship. The word "covenant" is repeated 13 times in Genesis 17, expressed nine times as "My covenant" (vv. 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21). The covenant between God and Abraham is essentially and fundamentally God's covenant. Five kinds of divine covenant acts are mentioned in Genesis 17 for a total of 16 times: "I will make/give" (vv. 2, 5, 6, 8, 16, 20), "I will multiply" (vv. 2, 20), "I will establish" (vv. 7, 19, 21), "I will make fruitful" (vv. 6, 20) and "I will bless" (vv. 16, 20). The character of the divine part is incredible, as seen in "multiply you **exceedingly**" (vv. 2, 6), "make you the father of a **multitude of nations**" (vv. 4, 5), "an **everlasting** covenant" (vv. 7, 13). At the heart of all these is the holy God's passion towards unholy humans: "to be God to you" (v. 7). "I will be their God" (v. 8): "Spiritually, the essence of the covenant is personal, like the 'I will' of a marriage: so the pledge 'I will be their God' far outweighs the particular benefits. This is the covenant."³⁷

■ Application

How do I relate to the divine part in my covenant relationship with God?

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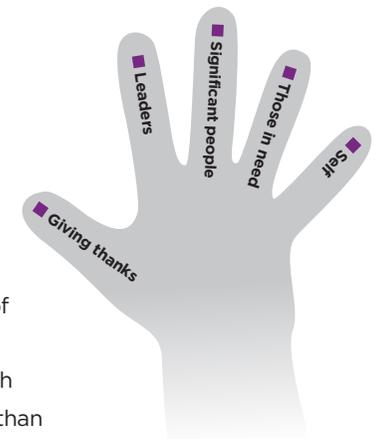
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■ Prayer

O Eternal God, how gracious You are to me that You want to be my God! I am so unworthy of such condescending invitation. And this covenant relationship You called me to have with You is made possible only by the blood of Your Beloved Son. Help me to be faithful to You until the end through Your faithfulness, which is greater than my utmost faithfulness. Amen.



³⁷ Derek Kidner, 129

May 22
Friday
2015

When We Fail in Covenant Faithfulness

■ **Scripture**

Ezekiel 20:33-44

■ **Observation**

What do you observe about God in His dealings with His unfaithful covenant people in exile in Babylon in verses 33 to 44?

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Deeper Reflection

Genesis 17:1-2 seems to say that God’s covenant faithfulness is contingent on the covenant faithfulness of Abraham and his descendants, Israel (“keep My covenant”, Ge 17:9-10) – and us as well (cf. Gal 3:6-9). Then for centuries, Israel broke God’s covenant again and again, and God in His wrath sent them to exile in Babylon. In exile, God spoke to His unfaithful people through Ezekiel (vv. 33-44). God promised to restore them (v. 34, 40-41), but a restoration through purging and purification (vv. 35-38). To Israel passing “under the rod” of God’s judgment, God said, “I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant” (v. 37). God was so sure that “later” Israel “will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer” (v. 39), that He could say (amazingly!), “Go, serve everyone his idols” (v. 39). On one hand, God’s faithfulness is contingent on our faithfulness; but on the other, overarching our faithfulness and unfaithfulness is God’s faithfulness. In dealing with Israel’s unfaithfulness, God emphasised this to them: “Know that I am the LORD” (vv. 38, 42, 44) – the faithful covenant God, who deals with us for His “name’s sake”, and not according to our “evil ways” and our “corrupt practices” (v. 44).

■ **Application**

How do I relate to God in moments when I am not faithful to Him?

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■ **Prayer**

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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May 23
Saturday
2015

God and Our Struggling Doubts

■ Scripture

Genesis 17:15-21

■ Observation

What do you discover about Abraham and his God in verses 15 to 21?

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Deeper Reflection

God spoke plainly and clearly to Abraham, “I will give you a son by Sarah” (v. 16). In response, Abraham “laughed” (v. 17). Abraham “wavered with skepticism”³⁸, stumbled “in incredulity”³⁹ and “doubt,”⁴⁰ and attempted “to steer God into a more reasonable path”⁴¹; “If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing!” (v. 18, NIV). It seems “bizarre”⁴² and incongruent. But it is a genuine struggle of faith. It is something very real in going through a long-drawn-out difficult situation, feeling powerless and helpless – like the condition of Abraham and Sarah (v. 17), struggling with what God says in His Word, and suggesting to ourselves that perhaps we should do what is humanly reasonable and possible, especially when we have an “Ishmael” at hand. But God showed His appreciation of where Abraham was coming from. Ignoring Abraham’s response, God just simply reassured him of His promise (v. 19a). And God even, with a play on his laughter, pre-named his promised son “Isaac,” which means “laughter” (v. 19b)! On “such genuine struggles of faith God is never hard”⁴³. “God’s grace is greater than our doubts.”⁴⁴

■ Application

How do I relate to God when I am struggling with doubt?

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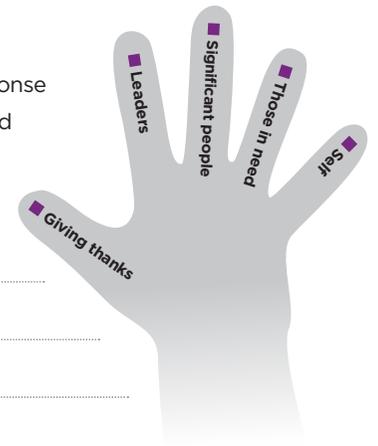
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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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³⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 264
³⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 262
⁴⁰ Derek Kidner, 130; Allan P. Ross, 335
⁴¹ Derek Kidner, 130
⁴² Allan P. Ross, 335 – citing Claus Westermann
⁴³ Derek Kidner, 130
⁴⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, 264

May 24
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

REFLECT

*What is one key thing that God said to me this week
in light of what has happened?*

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
May 2015 - Week 4
SIGNS OF GOD'S PROMISE

God has given us signs to show His faithfulness to His promises.

Scripture - Matthew 25:35-40

1. Activity Bite

Draw out a beautiful rainbow on the biggest piece of paper you can find. You can join several pieces of papers together to form a bigger sheet.

2. Chat Time

Q1: Which Bible story does this rainbow remind you of (Ge 9:8-17)?

Q2: Why does God need to give Noah a sign (i.e. the rainbow) when He makes a promise to him?

Q3: What are some signs of God's goodness to you?

3. Learning Point

God will always fulfil what He has promised. Often times He will show us signs so that we will know and see His works. Most signs are very simple and obvious. A bright sunny day is a sign of God's promise to give us a beautiful world to live in. A display of fresh fruits in a store shows us God's promise to give us good food to give our bodies strength. Friends helping us in bad times shows God's promise to help us. These signs can be easily missed unless we consciously think of them.

4. Action Point

Take a moment to look around you. List down all the things you believe are signs of God's promises to you. Thank Him for each of the things you have listed.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Thank You, God, for giving me so many signs of Your good promises. I often don't see them. You are truly a faithful God and I love You. Amen.

May 25
Monday
2015

God Comes as a Guest

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:1-8

■ Observation

How did Abraham respond to the unexpected divine visitation in verses 1 to 8?

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Deeper Reflection

“The LORD appeared to” Abraham (v. 1) as “three men” (v. 2) – a personal manifestation of God in human form, accompanied by two angels (v. 22, Ge 19:1⁴⁵). Abraham recognized one of them to be God, for he spoke to that person personally, addressing Him, “My Lord” (v. 3). “Lord” in “the Hebrew text refers to a title of God”⁴⁶. It was in the mundaneness of life that God appeared to Abraham – “while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day” (v. 1), having “his siesta”⁴⁷. God came to Abraham “as a Guest”⁴⁸, and Abraham showed God his “extravagant hospitality”⁴⁹ (vv. 2-8) – “a model for welcoming God’s presence”⁵⁰. How do I welcome God’s presence? With **earnest passion**: run to meet God immediately – “when he saw, he ran...to meet them” (v. 2). With **reverential worship**: “he bowed low to the ground” (v. 2) – “an appropriate gesture of awe and humility.”⁵¹ With **fervent devotion**: Abraham hosted God with “speedy exertion”⁵² – “hurried”, “quickly” (v. 6), “ran”, “hurried” (v. 7). These are not activism activities, but “noble character”⁵³ demonstrated by one who relates to God as “Your servant” (vv. 3, 5).

■ Application

What change(s) do I need to make when relating to God’s presence?

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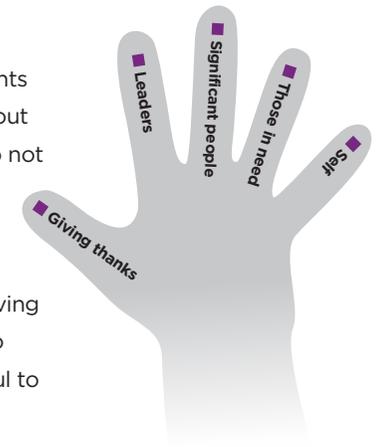
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■ Prayer

Forgive me, Lord Jesus, for moments and times when my sins shut You out of my heart. But even then, You do not walk away, but stand outside and knock on the door of my heart, seeking to enter my heart anew to eat with me and me with You in loving communion.⁵⁴ I don’t know what to say, Lord, except, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!”⁵⁵



⁴⁵ The “two angels” in 19:1 were the two “men” who were distinct from “the LORD” in 18:22.

⁴⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 267

⁴⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 266

⁴⁸ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Pentateuch: Chapter by Chapter* (Kregel, 1957), 46

⁴⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 266

⁵⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 271

⁵¹ Bruce K. Waltke, 267

⁵² Bruce K. Waltke, 267

⁵³ Bruce K. Waltke, 266

⁵⁴ Revelation 3:20

⁵⁵ Luke 18:13

May 26
Tuesday
2015

Divine Patient Teaching and Transforming

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:9-15

■ Observation

What do you observe about God and Sarah in verses 9 to 15?

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Deeper Reflection

Abraham had been learning much about God’s plan for his life, but apparently not so for Sarah. When God promised Abraham He would give him descendants (Ge 13:16), Abraham thought that his servant would be his heir (Ge 15:2-3). But God told him specifically that his heir would be a natural son (Ge 15:4). So, Abraham had a son, but by his wife’s servant, Hagar (Ge 16:1-4); but God told him he would have a natural son by his own wife (Ge 17:15-16). Abraham believed that “but his wife had to believe it too, for obvious reasons”⁵⁶. This is one reason for the divine visitation in Genesis 18: “Where is Sarah your wife?” (v. 9). God told Abraham that He will return to him “next year” and Sarah would “have a son”, knowing that Sarah was eavesdropping (v. 10). When Sarah heard that, she “laughed” (v. 12) “unbelievably at God’s promise”⁵⁷. “Why did Sarah laugh?” (v. 13) was “God’s rebuke” of Sarah for “persisting in unbelief”⁵⁸. “No, I didn’t laugh,” Sarah “lied” to God (v. 15). Sarah’s “interest in the covenant and promise was still shallow”⁵⁹. But God was gracious: He still stood by His promise (v. 14). It took God a long time to develop the faith of this couple – and our faith. God is very patient in teaching us and transforming our lives.

■ Application

What is God teaching me now and how am I responding to Him?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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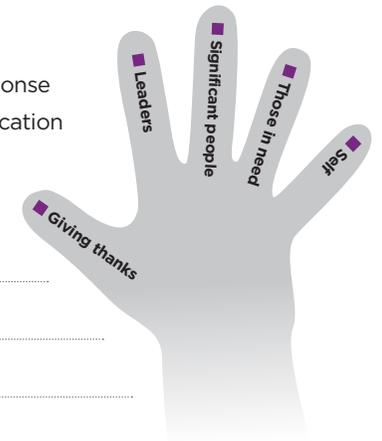
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⁵⁶ D. Stuart Briscoe, 155
⁵⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 268
⁵⁸ Derek Kidner, 132
⁵⁹ Derek Kidner, 132

May 27
Wednesday
2015

“Is Anything Too Difficult for the LORD?”

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:11-15

■ Observation

How do you understand “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (Ge 18:14) in the context of Ge 18:11-15?

Deeper Reflection

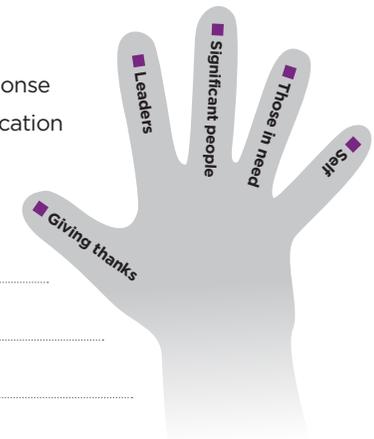
“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (v. 14) is God’s revelation of who He is, and not a promise to be claimed freely, indiscriminately, presumptuously. That God can do all things does not mean that God will do all things. God exercises His power according to His purpose in His sovereign freedom and wisdom. “The ability of God is not limitless because He has chosen to set limits upon it.”⁶⁰ We cannot expect God to do the impossible in all things at all times. This divine revelation requires us to walk in God’s revealed will (cf. Ge 17:1). “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” is part of “God’s rebuke” of Sarah for her laughter of “persisting in unbelief”⁶¹ (vv. 12-14a). Here we see on one hand, God’s Word about Himself demanding faith from Sarah; but on the other, God still working towards fulfilling His promise to Abraham and Sarah nonetheless (v. 14b). “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” is greater than Sarah’s failure in faith. We have hope in God despite our struggling faith. The Hebrew word for “difficult” basically means wonderful, extraordinary, surpassing, marvellous or incomparable.⁶² God delights in working in our lives with His surpassing wonders that will surprise us.

■ Application

In what ways is “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” relevant to my life right now?

■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



⁶⁰ D. Stuart Briscoe, 155

⁶¹ Derek Kidner, 132

⁶² Allen P. Ross, 344

May 28
Thursday
2015

Abraham, the Friend of God

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:17-21

■ Observation

What do you observe about Abraham's relationship with God in verses 17 to 21?

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Deeper Reflection

Abraham is the only one in the Old Testament called “the friend of God” (Isa 41:82, 2 Ch 20:7; Jas 2:23). What does it mean to be a friend of God? **Portrait** of friendship with God: “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (v. 17). God’s answer to His own rhetorical question is obvious: “Of course, not!” Abraham’s relationship with God had developed such an intimacy that God wanted to share deeply with him His heart and mind. “I have chosen him” (v. 19) literally reads, “I have known him”, which means “I have an intimate relationship with him”⁶³. **Purpose** of being a friend of God: “in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (v. 18), through Abraham directing “his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD” (v. 19, NIV). This presupposes that Abraham himself is keeping the way of God (cf. Ge 17:1). A friend of God is deeply committed to and involved in fulfilling God’s redemptive purposes together with Him in mission-fellowship. **Process** to becoming a friend of God: it takes time, stumbling in failures, learning, unlearning, relearning – just like Abraham. God wants you to become His friend (cf. Jn 15:14-15).

■ Application

How am I challenged in my relationship with God in the context of Abraham being “the friend of God”?

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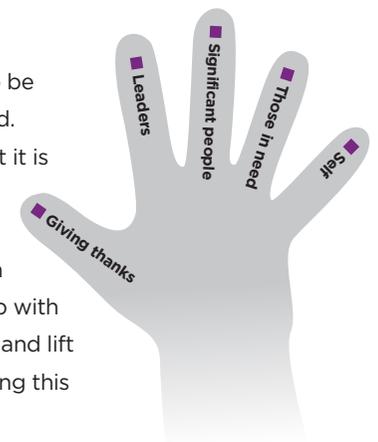
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■ Prayer

Thank You, God, for wanting me to be Your friend. I want to be Your friend. Such friendship is a gift of God, but it is also a reality that I have to grow into. Grant me this most precious gift, and help me to grow into such intimate relationship and fellowship with You. And graciously hold my hand and lift me up when I stumble and fall during this journey. Amen.



⁶³ Bruce K. Waltke, 269

May 29
Friday
2015

Justice of the Righteous Judge

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:22-33

■ Observation

What do you observe about the justice of God from the conversation between Abraham and God in verses 22 to 33?

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Deeper Reflection

The predominant theme of Abraham’s “negotiation”⁶⁴ with God is God’s justice: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (v. 25). God’s destruction of Sodom must be viewed in the context of God seeking to bless “all the nations of the earth” through Abraham (Ge 18:18), and God’s command of “doing righteousness and justice” (Ge 18:19). The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is repeatedly emphasised throughout the whole conversation (vv. 23-32). The point is this: God’s destruction of Sodom’s “exceedingly wicked” people (Ge 13:13) is a “foregone conclusion”⁶⁵, and God is absolutely just in doing that. Abraham’s negotiation is “not going to alter the situation”⁶⁶. When Abraham heard God saying He will not destroy the wicked city on account of 10 righteous people (v. 32), he saw clearly the just God’s willingness to be merciful, and thus, when divine judgment is a “foregone conclusion”, God is acting justly. This is evident in God being the one who ended the conversation – “He had finished speaking to Abraham” (v. 33). God is righteous and just even when injustice prevails and God’s people are on the receiving end. We must wait for God’s “appointed time” to “judge with equity” (Ps 75:2; Rev 6:9-11).

■ Application

What does it mean to me personally that God is a just God?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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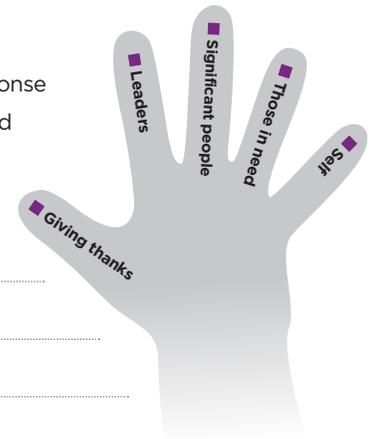
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⁶⁴ Allen P. Ross, 348
⁶⁵ Allen P. Ross, 347
⁶⁶ Allen P. Ross, 347

May 30
Saturday
2015

Heart-to-Heart Talk with God

■ Scripture

Genesis 18:22-33

■ Observation

What do you learn about prayer from the conversation between Abraham and God in verses 22 and 23?

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Deeper Reflection

Verses 22 to 33 presents “the friend of God” having a heart-to-heart talk with his God. It “would be easy to say that this prayer comes near to haggling with God, but the right word is ‘exploring’⁶⁷. The starting point of Abraham’s prayer is theology – knowing God: “the Judge of all the earth” is a just God (v. 25), which undergirds his whole conversation with God. His questioning of God concerning His justice (vv. 23-25) stems out of his concern for the whole wicked city, but more importantly, for the glory of God. In spite of having the God-bestowed honour of being “the father of a multitude of nations” (Ge 17:4-5), and God sharing with him His heart and mind (Ge 18:17), Abraham is fully aware that “I am dust and ashes” (v. 27) – like Peter in Jesus’ holy presence, “I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Lk 5:8). Abraham is conscious of God’s transcendence: he addresses God as “Lord” four times (vv. 27, 30, 31, 32). There is a distance in his closeness to God. As he “ventured” further in his negotiation with God, his sense of God’s holiness causes him to humbly say, “Oh may the Lord not be angry” (vv. 31, 32). Intimacy does not permit over-familiarity. Is my relationship and fellowship with God like this?

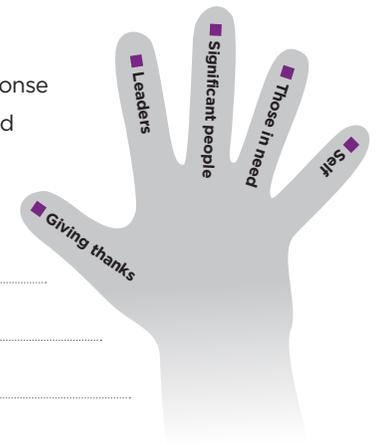
■ Application

How does Abraham’s heart-to-heart talk with God affect the way I pray to God?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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⁶⁷ Derek Kidner, 133

May 31
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

REFLECT

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
May 2015 - Week 5

STAND IN THE GAP

Praying for others will help them experience God's love.

Scripture - Genesis 18:16-33

1. Activity Bite

Play a game of charades and try to get as many correct answers as possible within three minutes.

2. Chat Time

Q1: How did you feel when you got the right answer?

Q2: How does this game help you understand what it means to stand in the gap for someone who doesn't know Jesus?

Q3: How does praying for someone help him or her experience God's love?

3. Learning Point

All who believe in Jesus have experienced God's love and goodness. But how can our friends who don't know Him experience this love unless we tell them? We are standing in the gap between God and them. We have many opportunities to share the good news and pray for them. When God answers our prayers, our friends will experience God's love.

4. Action Point

Think of three friends who do not know Jesus. Say a prayer of blessing for each of them. It could be a prayer for healing or for a safe holiday trip. Tell them that you have prayed for them.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Thank You, Lord, because I can pray for my friends. I want them to know You. Show them Your love so that they will believe in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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