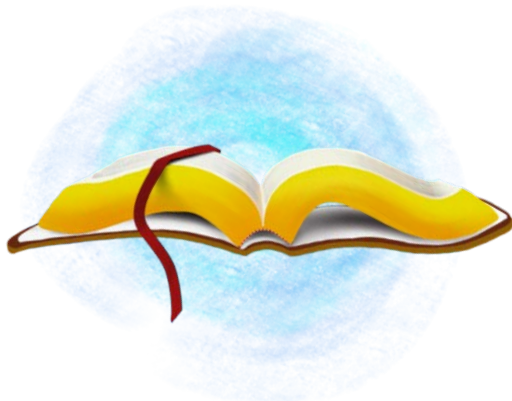


Job • Abram



"Know the Bible, Fear the Lord"

2017 February (1-14) Devotional Booklet

(Published by Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church)

Introduction To Quiet Time/Personal Devotion

What Is Quiet Time/Personal Devotion: Quiet Time or Personal Devotion is more than just reading the Bible, it's a time of fellowship and dating with God. It's a time to get to know God and His will more as well as to enjoy His presence. Since personal devotion is a process of communication, it involves both "listening" (Reading His Word, Meditating, and Reflecting) and "talking" (Praying, Responding, and Devoting) to Him.

Time and Place: Choose a quiet place and a set time. If possible, morning is most ideal. If you must choose another time, choose a time when you can be most serene and alert. Also make sure that you do your devotion before you spend time on the computer, TV, internet, or games so that your mind will not be filled with distractions that prevent you from meditating on God's words.

Focus: Ask God to quiet your heart and to open your eyes so that you can understand God's words. You can also praise God or sing a short hymn to Him.

Read & Reread: Read the Scripture carefully and meditate on what God is telling you. Usually, you may not be able to understand the meaning and essence of a passage when you first read it; only through repetition and meditation can one gain meaningful insights.

Using the Devotional Booklet: ①Please follow the steps in this booklet to first calm your heart with a short prayer and praise, then read and reread the given passage, and answer the questions accordingly. Then read the contributor's insights and see how you could apply what you have learned in your life. Finally, end your Quiet Time with prayer and ask God to help you live out His words. ②Besides the reflection questions, notes, and applications, this booklet also asks the reader to fill in the date and time of each daily devotion so that the reader can evaluate his/her devotional life more precisely. ③The Scriptures quoted in this booklet are from NIV (1984). We would encourage you not to use the Bible Apps in your cell phone to read the Scriptures lest you will be distracted by the notifications or incoming calls. ④This Devotion booklet is contributed by various staff of the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church and is first written in either Chinese or English, and translated by other brothers and sisters. The contribution of the staff as well as of the translators is deeply appreciated. At times, some devotions are written in both languages by the contributor. ⑤Memory verses may be quoted for meditation and memorization depending on the context and as needed; thus, it may not be provided daily.

Introduction To Genesis

- Author: Moses
- Date of Writing: Approx. 1400 B.C.
- Theme: Divine blessings, and the conflict between good and evil

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." This is the introduction of the Book of Genesis as well as the entire Bible. Not only did Genesis describe how God created everything out of nothing, but it also recorded how human beings rebelled against God, and reaped the terrible consequences of sin. However, God did not forsake His creation because of their rebellion. Instead, He chose a specific group of people from among all mankind, and through this group bestowed blessings upon all nations.

The Hebrew word for "account" (*tôledôt*) is repeated throughout the book of Genesis. The Chinese Bible translated this word as "origin," "descendants," "accounts," and the like. The English title "Genesis" comes from the Greek word "*geneseōs*," which was the Greek translation of "*tôledôt*." This key word links up the following major sections of the book of Genesis, giving an account of the origin of this world and the development of the Hebrew nation:

1. Creation (1:1-2:3)
2. The origin of heaven and earth (2:4-4:26)
3. The descendants of Adam (5:1-6:8)
4. The descendants of Noah (6:9-9:29)
5. The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9)
6. The descendants of Shem (11:10-26)
7. The descendants of Terah (11:27-25:11)
8. The descendants of Ishmael (25:12-18)
9. The descendants of Isaac (25:19-35: 29)
10. The descendants of Esau (Edom) (36:1-8; 36:9-37:1)
11. The descendants Jacob (37:2-50:26)

The first eleven chapters of Genesis recorded four events that affected the whole world. The next thirty-nine chapters described the lives of four patriarchs chosen by God and how God used their families to influence the history of mankind.

Four Events				Four People			
Creation	Fall	Flood	Nations	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph
1	2	3	5	6	9	10	11
12	24	25	26	27	36	37	50
Beginning of Human Race				Beginning of Hebrew Race			



Important places in the book of Genesis

1. The mountains of Ararat: Noah's ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (8:4)
2. Babel: God confused the language of the world (11:8-9)
3. Ur of the Chaldeans: the birthplace of Abraham (11:28)
4. Harran: Abraham stayed in Harran temporarily on his way to Canaan (11:31)
5. Shechem: Abraham left Harran and arrived in Canaan, lived for a period of time in the city of Shechem (12:6)
6. Hebron: Abraham settled in the city of Hebron (13:18)
7. Beersheba: Abraham and Abimelek made a treaty there (21:31). God appeared to Isaac, and renewed with him the covenant He had made with Abraham (26:23-25)
8. Bethel: Jacob saw, in his dream, a stairway which reached from earth to heaven (28:10-22)
9. Egypt: Joseph was sold as a slave, then taken to Egypt (37: 28); Jacob and his whole family moved to Egypt (46:3-4)

You, Too, Can Be Blameless

Passage: Job 1:1-5

February 1

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD’S WORD: Read Job 1:1-5 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: This devotional journal will now switch focus from the Tower of Babel to the story of Job. Job probably lived in the Patriarchal age (i.e. the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Book of Job is an independent unit that is not connected to the stories of the Patriarchs in Genesis. Therefore, we will first learn from Job's experience, and will later return to Genesis to see how God has chosen "one family" to form the Hebrew Race.

The author of the Book of Job, the date of its composition, and the date and location of the events are unknown. It is likely that it is the oldest book of the Old Testament. While the book addresses the problem of suffering, suffering is not the central theme. Rather, the focus is on what Job learned from his suffering — the sovereignty of God over all creation.

The Book of Job — Controversies Between...																						
God & Satan		Job & His Friends										God & Job										
1	2	3							37			38	42									
Satan's 1st Accusation, Job Was Tested	Satan's 2nd Accusation, Job Was Tested	Job Cursed His Birthday	Round 1			Round 2			Round 3			God's Challenge Job's Confession Job's Blessings										
			4	7	8	10	11	14	15	17	18		19	20	21	22	24	25	31	32	37	38
1	2	3	4	7	8	10	11	14	15	17	18	19	20	21	22	24	25	31	32	37	38	42

RE-READING GOD’S WORD: Read the chapter again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How does v.1 describe Job? How can we learn from him and cultivate those qualities?

2. What spiritual principles can we glean from Job's actions in v.5?

Job was described as being “blameless”. It doesn't mean that he was sinless; but that he was a man without any moral blemish. Being “upright” means that he did not deviate from God's standards. He also “feared God” and “shunned evil” — meaning that he acknowledged God's majesty, was willing to submit to His authority, and determined to reject evil. His arrangements for his children after their periods of feasting (Job got each of them sanctified through burnt offerings, teaching them the importance of such) set a wonderful example of strong faith, loving and godly leadership as a parent, and a sensitive conscience towards sin.

Often times, we feel inadequate when we read about the accomplishments of spiritual giants — how can we ever match up with people like Noah and Job, whom God called blameless? But in fact, these spiritual giants are not flawless. They simply had resolved to obey God and follow Him in every way. Jesus admonished His disciples to do the same: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48. Thus we can see that being “blameless” is not the privilege of a few, but a requirement for all of God's children. Let us shy away from quoting “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” as an excuse for a mediocre lifestyle. Why not do our utmost to be blameless, and submit to the LORD's perfect will.

APPLICATION: What are some areas that you can focus on this week to work towards being blameless and upright? List specific steps or actions that you can take.

Prayer: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

God's Hedges

Passage: Job 1:6-12

February 2

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 1:6-12 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Satan" refers to the devil, a fallen angel.

Job 1:6 says, "Satan also came with them." It points to the fact that Satan had (and still has) access to God today to accuse the saints; as stated in Revelation 12:10: "...the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night..."

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 1:6-12 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What kind of assurance and comfort do you find in verses 10 and 12?

2. Besides attacking Job's motive for godliness, what else was Satan trying to imply in his accusation recorded in verses 9-11
 - a) regarding the relationship between man and God; and
 - b) regarding the reason why God is worthy to be revered?

Two facts emerged from the dialogue between God and Satan:
① Our lives are in the hands of God and not determined by fate or under Satan's control. Job 1:10 tells us that it was God who "put a

hedge around him and his household and everything he has." Satan was able to inflict suffering on Job only because God gave him the permission to do so, and his power was subject to God's restrictions — "but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (1:12).
② The relationship between God and mankind is not founded on mutual benefit or an oversimplified, manmade system of blessing and cursing based on human actions.

Satan did not only accuse Job of a selfish motivation for his faith, he also wrongly concluded that the relationship between man and God is transactional by nature, one based on merit, obligation, and compensation. He also hinted that God (with His attributes and character) was not worthy to be revered and worshiped, and that Job feared God, not because God deserves it, but solely because of His blessings.

May we all learn from this passage what it means to have a reverential trust of God. No matter how difficult the circumstances, how severe the trials, or how unrelenting the attacks are, we need to learn to trust God, who puts a hedge around us to protect us, and believe that without His permission, not even a hair would fall off our heads ("And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Matthew 10:30). Be sure of the fact that God deserves our highest reverence and praise. We should always obey and follow His will — whether amidst hardship or prosperity.

APPLICATION: Think about the various hedges that God has placed around you. Thank Him for watching over you during both good times and bad times.

MEMORY VERSE: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Give And Take

Passage: Job 1:13-22

February 3

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 1:13-22 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The Sabeans may have come from the region of Sheba in south west Arabia or from the town of Sheba located near Dedan, in upper Arabia.

The Chaldeans were fierce marauders who came from Mesopotamia in the north.

The fire of God (vs.16) probably refers to lightning.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 1:13-22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What did Job lose in one single day (1:13-19, 1:2-3)? If you were Job, how would you feel and what might you be thinking?

2. What was Job's response after he heard the horrendous news?

3. What truth does the Bible reveal to us through Job's declaration in v. 21?

Job came under brutal assault four times in one day — he lost 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many servants; and most tragic of all, all 10 of his children. He tore his robe and shaved his head as an expression of great grief; but

never did Job curse or blame God. Instead, he fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Amid intense suffering, he exclaimed "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." From this we can see that Job believed in the following three truths: ① He did not deserve anything that he owned or possessed (including his family). He recognized that he did not bring anything into this world and could not take anything with him after he died. Since things on earth was like a mist that would vanish, one should not hold onto them too tightly. ② God had absolute sovereignty over each man's gain or lost. Since Job did not bring anything into this world, all that he had were given by God. So, even if God were to take away anything from Job, it would not really be a big deal for He had all the right in the world to do it. ③ Whatever circumstances Job was in, God's name was worthy to be praised. In a nutshell, Job's response was totally opposite to our usual reaction and to what Satan had predicted. We often have the tendency to question or to blame God when we go through suffering and difficulties; and Satan even predicted that Job would surely curse God to His face ("curse" in the original language is the word "bless," probably used here in a euphemistic way). It is truly remarkable that Job had reacted in such a way, not only did he *not* blame God, but he praised and worshiped God instead. Let us learn from Job's example, to recognize God's sovereignty in our lives and to surrender to His perfect will. Being confident that God is the One who "gives songs in the night" (Job 35:10), we could, in turn, offer Him praise in whatever situation we are in.

APPLICATION: What has God given you? What did He take away from you? What lessons have you learned from the "giving" and "taking away" experience?

Blessings that God gave me:

What God has taken away:

What I learned:

MEMORY VERSE: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." Job 1:21

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Through Wind And Rain

Passage: Job 2:1-10

February 4

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 2:1-10 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Satan's second attack on Job involved his health: he suffered painful sores all over his body (2:7), intense itching (2:8), degenerative changes in facial skin (2:7,12), loss of appetite (3:24), depression (3:24-25), weakness (6:11), worm-filled festering sores (7:5), difficulty breathing (9:18), dark circles under the eyes (16:16), putrid breath (19:17), excessive thinness (19:20, 33:21), continuous pain (30:17), restlessness (30:27), peeling and blackened skin (30:30), and fever (30:30).

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 2:1-10 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Imagine you were Job. Calamities came upon you one after another, but you did not turn your back on God. Now you are being afflicted with all the above symptoms. How would you feel? What would you think?

2. Do you find encouragement and inspiration from Job's answer to his wife in vs.10?

3. Why do you think God had seemingly provoked Satan (twice) to afflict Job (1:8, 2:3) [there may not be a standard answer]?

Job did not only lose his wealth, his children, his status and dignity; he was also tormented with a severe physical illness and the antagonism of his wife. Yet he held on to his faith and maintained a pure heart that clung to God. Yes, suffering can make people doubt God and even forsake Him, but it can also test and purify our faith, as well as help us cling to our unchanging God and His promises.

The Bible does not give a clear explanation of why God seemingly provoked Satan twice to afflict Job; yet, we can be certain that: ① Through the two attacks of Satan, God allowed Job to grow in his trials and let him understand His sovereignty — that God had the right to bestow adversities, as well as blessings. As Psalm 119: 71 teaches us, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." ② God allowed the devil to attack Job, but not beyond what he could bear. God had been setting boundaries on Satan's attack. Just as 1 Corinthians 10:13 encourages us, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." ③ God wants us to learn that being a devout follower of God does not depend on one's circumstances, but on having a pure heart of faith towards God. It is like a child living in poverty will not simply forsake his loving parents because of the family hardship.

Likewise, we need to have a simple faith and believe that God is good, and He has the best plan for each one of us. When we do that, we can truly rest beneath the shadow of His wings and fearlessly weather the storms of life.

APPLICATION: Think of some of the difficult or painful experiences you had in the past. How did they help mold and shape you to become the person you are today?

MEMORY VERSE: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Close Encounter In The Storm

Passage: Job 38:1-11, 40:1-5, 42:1-6

February 5

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 38:1-11; 40:1-5; 42:1-6 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: After a series of unthinkable hardships, Job cursed the day of his birth and sat on the ground with his friends for seven days without saying a word to anyone. He regretted being born, wished that he had died in the womb, and longed for the day of his death (but he never cursed God). His three friends determined that Job had sinned and was being chastened by God. Arguments were exchanged, and finally the young Elihu began to speak and told them that they were all in the wrong. Elihu pointed out that suffering might not always be a punishment for a person's sin; but instead, might be apportioned by God for one's benefit. He rebuked Job for his complaining and self-righteous attitude towards God, and urged him to humble himself before the Almighty. At this time, God answered Job out of the storm with more than seventy questions. God reminded Job that He was the One who created and had dominion over, not just the amazing nature, but in fact, the whole universe. This brought Job into submission and full realization of God's sovereignty; thus, to the repentance of his self-righteousness.

"...my eyes have seen you" (42:5) refers to spiritual understanding, not physically seeing God.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read the above passages again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. If you were Job, how would you answer that long list of questions from God (38:4-8)? How would the answers (to those questions) pertain to Job's suffering and consolation?

2. Reflect upon your spiritual journey. Which parts of it fall within the respective domains of "my ears had heard of you" and "my eyes have seen you"? How did those experiences differ?

"My ears had heard of you":

"My eyes have seen you":

Their differences:

When we have a close encounter with the Almighty Creator, who is in sovereign control over the universe, how can we not acknowledge our ignorance and our lowly status; and despise ourselves in silent remorse like Job? Through the 70+ questions in the whirlwind, God displayed His power and wisdom, showing Job's ignorance and impatience — If man could not even comprehend or control God's work in the "natural world," how then could man demand to comprehend God's operation in the "supernatural (spiritual) world"?

Instead of worrying or being anxious over the unknown future in this chaotic world, let us put our trust in the LORD who created heaven and earth, who is sovereign over everything, and who sacrificed His only son for us. Let Him guide our every step, so that we can experience God even in our trials and "see" Him with our eyes.

APPLICATION: Approach the Lord in humility, and give Him complete authority over your life. Allow God to lead you and reveal Himself to you in the whirlwind.

MEMORY VERSE: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." Job 42:5

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

A Wounded Healer

Passage: Job 42:7-17

February 6

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 42:7-17 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: What God blessed Job with afterward (42:12-23) was double of what he had (1:2-3). The only exception was that God only blessed Job with seven sons and three daughters without doubling their numbers. This points to the fact that, from a spiritual perspective, Job had never lost his children (their souls are in heaven); and including those in heaven, Job, indeed, did have double the number of children (ten in heaven, and ten on earth). This, actually, could be a source of affirmation and comfort for those who have lost their family members who are believers.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Job 42:7-17 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How did the roles of Job and his friends reverse in this chapter? (42:7-10)

2. How is the comfort that Job received in 42:11 different from the "comfort" given by his three friends (wept aloud, grieved, sat quietly with him, rebuked him...)? What can you learn from this?

From the process of Job receiving comfort from friends and family, we can see two different approaches toward comforting those who are hurting. Though his friends started with empathy as they sat alongside and cried with him, they eventually turned into judges who prematurely condemned Job to be at fault. On the other hand, even though his family and those he knew might have neglected him at first (19:13-14); towards the end, they were willing to have fellowship with him (eat together), to comfort him, to tend to his practical needs, and to relieve his financial burden. Whether you are the hurting or the comforter, asking "why" cannot bring comfort. Instead, maybe we need to ask "how" and "what" — "How can we face the difficulties now?" "How can I help the hurting?" "What does he need the most right now?" etc.

As Job was willing to be humble and obedient before God, to recognize God's sovereignty, and to repent; the whole situation turned around. All along, Job was taking the role of a victim and defendant — hoping for his friends' understanding and God's advocacy ("Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God" 16:19-20); yet suddenly he has turned into an advocate, a priest, and an intercessor. Is this not the same roles that God has commissioned us? Let us not be entrapped in the abyss of self-pity and hide in a dark corner to lick our wounds; but instead, let us learn from the example of Job and become a wounded healer to "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:4b)

APPLICATION: Please remember the concept of a "wounded healer" and continue to reflect upon it. Try to pay attention to those who are hurting or in need around you. Try to understand their needs (write down their name and needs in the space below), to offer help, and to pray for them.

MEMORY VERSE: "Who (God) comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Corinthians 1:4

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Leaving And Following

Passage: Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-9

February 7

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-9 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Chapter 11 is the turning point of the book of Genesis; moreover, the turning point of the whole human history. Because of the rebellious act of building the Tower of Babel, the family of Adam and Eve had spread to become the nations. And, out of all these nations, God had chosen Abraham, through whom, the focal point of human history fell onto this one family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — the beginning of the Hebrew Race.

"Abram" was the original name of Abraham, which means "exalted father"; his name was changed to "Abraham" after God had made a covenant with him,

"Ur of the Chaldeans" (11:28) is located in about 350km outside of today's Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. It was the most famous city in Mesopotamia. In Abram's time, it was an important trade city that was highly civilized.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read the above passages again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Please list out God's promises to Abram.

2. In the process of God calling Abram, how do you see Abram's faith in the Lord?

The original name of Abraham, the Father of Faith, was Abram. He came from a family that worshiped gentile idols in the land of "Ur." He didn't have any religious foundation or nurture (see Joshua 24:2 "...Torah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods."); yet, the LORD asked him to "go from (his) country, (his) people and (his) father's house," which entailed giving up what he had believed in, relied on, and worshiped; and to jump into a new relationship, a new purpose of life, toward the land that God would show him. At that time, God has not clearly specified to where Abram was supposed to go ("go to the land I will show you"); even when he arrived at Canaan, God did not explain to him what kind of place it was. Yet Abram was willing to respond to God's calling; by faith, at the age of seventy-five, he uprooted himself to move to a foreign place, leaving behind his familiar homeland, his family, and his friends.

However, this obedience of "leaving and following" was the path to Abram's blessings. God's promise to Abram can be divided into three areas: ① God promised to make Abram into a great nation, ② to bless him, and ③ to make his name great. As God blessed Abram, he would then become the channel of blessing for all the nations on earth. Is this not the example that God wants us to model after? Let us learn to obey God's guidance, to leave behind the ungodly old-self — the "Ur" of our past, to move into God's Promised Land, and to become a blessing to many.

APPLICATION: Think through your spiritual journey thus far. What are some of the things that you need to leave behind? What are some of the goals that you need to set and follow so that you could become a blessing to others?

Leave Behind:

Follow:

MOMORY VERSE: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

A Dangerous Shortcut

Passage: Genesis 12:10-20

February 8

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 12:10-20 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Sarai" (who later became "Sarah"), was the wife of Abraham; she was also his stepsister from the same father.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 12:10-20 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Out of fear, Abram asked Sarai to tell a white lie saying that she was his sister, leaving out the fact that she was also his wife. How did this lie affect the following people (or God)?

Abram:

Sarai:

Pharaoh:

God:

2. How should we face the temptation of "white lies" or "half truths" in our daily living?

The faith journey of Abram came to its first test. Abram, out of fear, moved to Egypt without first seeking God's will. Also, out of fear, Abram used his own way to protect himself from being killed by the Egyptians, putting his wife in danger by saying that Sarai was his sister; again, without asking the LORD. Out of fear, Abram lost focus on God's promise, and leaned on his own wits; to the point of sacrificing his wife's dignity and purity to protect his own safety. On the surface, Abram had used a quick and easy way to solve the problem; but, in reality, "a man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7), and any short cuts that are not pleasing to God will be in vain, or even make things worse.

Can we see ourselves in Abram? When we try to avoid certain issues, do we "lie" or just tell the "partial truth" that is to our favor to solve the problem? Proverbs 29:25 teaches us that "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." Let's build our faith and security on God's word and promises, rather than on man's "wisdom and wit." Our words could bring glory to God, but it could also leave a foothold for the devil! Proverbs 3:5-7 teaches us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil." May the failure of Abram remind us that even in the midst of trials and difficulties, let us hold onto the teaching of God so that we will not lean on our own ways to solve the problems.

APPLICATION: Examine your life to see if you are using any ungodly ways to solve problems. Bring these short cuts before God to ask for forgiveness, and make a decision not to use them again.

MEMORY VERSE: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." Galatians 6:7-8

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Decision, Decision!

Passage: Genesis 13:1-18

February 9

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 13:1-18 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 13:1-18 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. For the peace and harmony of the family as well as the herdsmen of Lot and himself, Abram was willing to let Lot have the first pick on where to settle. What can you learn from his approach?
2. In what ways was Lot's choice good? In what ways was his choice not so ideal? Why?
3. It seems to be a pattern that wherever Abram went, he would build an altar to call on the name of the LORD (12:7; 12:8; 13:4; 13:18), how does this inspire you?

Genesis chapter 13 is a new beginning for Abram. He left Egypt, the place where he failed, to return to the place where he had built an altar; again, Abram called on the name of the Lord. Since God blessed both Lot and Abram with much wealth and livestock, they were forced to go separate ways because of the quarreling between their herdsmen. Although Abram was called by God and was Lot's uncle, he took the initiative to give Lot the priority to choose where to settle. Even though he knew that he might not get the best piece of land, it did not bother him. He placed the harmony of his family relationship above his own desires. When he was in Egypt, his top priority was his own safety, even to the point of sacrificing his wife; but Abram had now learned to live by faith and not by sight. In fact, not only did Abram not lose out by giving up the first choice, but also after he had parted with Lot, God promised to give him all the land that he could see and descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (13:15-17).

On the contrary, it might seem, at first glance, that Lot had chosen the best piece of land where it was well watered and even compared to the garden of Eden. Yet, he did not see the enormous trials that the evil of Sodom would bring into his life, even to the point of destroying his family. In addition, Lot only thought of his own benefit without considering his uncle Abram's needs or the issue of fairness. Obviously, his choice was solely based on his self-interest and not on God's guidance. After all, Lot's choice was far from being good, but a prelude to his family's tragedy.

Nowadays, we have to make different decisions every day. To the left or to the right, which direction would you choose? Abram or Lot, whom would you follow? Call on the name of the Lord or pitch your tent near Sodom, which way would you go?

APPLICATION: When you have to make any decisions, remember to call on the name of the Lord rather than make a rash choice based on the benefits on the surface.

Decisions that need prayer:

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Two Kinds of Blessing

Passage: Genesis 14:14-24

February 10

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 14:14-24 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Salem" (14:18) means peace, referring to Jerusalem.

"Melchizedek" means the righteous king.

In the time of Abram, even though the Mosaic Law has not been given, tithing was an old and widespread custom in the ancient orient. Tithes were given to both sanctuaries and kings.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 14:14-24 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Abram give a tenth of what he got to Melchizedek king of Salem? What lesson could you learn from his action? (Try not to jump to the conclusion of tithing. Try analyzing the identity of Melchizedek and what he had brought to Abram, thus leading to Abram's response.)

2. Why did Abram refuse to take the goods of the king of Sodom? What can we learn from his determination?

At the end of a glorious victory, two kings await — one to give you blessing, the other wealth; one is the priest of God Most High, the other the leader of a wicked city. Whom would you choose? Or would you embrace both? This was Abram's decision. Melchizedek king of Salem welcomed Abram with bread and wine, and he blessed Abram. Since Melchizedek was a type/foreshadow of Jesus, his offering of "bread and wine" reminds us of the bread, wine, and blessing at the Last Supper. In his blessing, Melchizedek reminded Abram that his victory, including everything that he had brought back, was given by God. In response to this, Abram gave a tenth of everything back to God through this mediator.

As with the goods that the king of Sodom allowed Abram to keep, those goods were the plunder that belonged to the victor in the first place. Yet, in order to draw the line between himself and evil, and to prevent the king of Sodom from taking credit from God by saying that Abram was blessed through the wealth of Sodom, Abram sternly rejected all things from the city of Sodom. This further manifested Abram's faith in God's promise to bless him.

In the same way, we also have two kings who await to bless us — the king of this world offers the splendor of all nations, that we may rely on things in this world; versus the King of Kings offers His blessing, so that we may know that we have no good thing apart from God. Two paths of blessing, which would you choose?

APPLICATION: Compare the blessings that you have received from God with the counterfeit blessings from the world. Also, evaluate your personal giving/offering for areas for improvement.

Blessing from God:

Counterfeit blessing:

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

From Zero To Innumerable

Passage: Genesis 15:1-6

February 11

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 15:1-6 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The Bible does not explain in detail the identity of Eliezer of Damascus (15:2), but he was probably a faithful servant of Abram. According to the custom at that time, servants were allowed to inherit the possessions of a master who had no children.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 15:1-6 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. God asked Abram not to be afraid and referred to Himself as Abram's shield. How do you feel about this affirmation from God? Reflect on this past year, in what ways has God been your shield? Try to list out the events.

2. It is an unimaginable leap to go from "zero" to "innumerable," but it is precisely the leap of faith that God wanted Abram to take (to believe that God could take him from being childless to having descendents as numerous as the stars). Reflecting on your spiritual life, when were you at the junctures where you were met with such a challenge in your faith? What were the results?

"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Genesis 15:6 is a succinct description of Abram's spiritual life; and the New Testament has also repeatedly quoted this verse to affirm the truth of "justification by faith" (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23). "Righteousness" refers to the correct action and attitude before God, while the verb "believe" may have the idea of considering something dependable and acting on it. Abram accepted the Word of God as reliable and true and acted in accordance with it; consequently, the LORD declared Abram righteous, and therefore acceptable (such attitudes and actions are right in the eyes of God and conform to God's standard).

Likewise, in the course of our spiritual growth, God does not demand us to be flawless, but rather to trust Him with a pure heart and to act upon that trust. As in Abram's action of "leaving and following," Abram believed that God was his shield, thus he fearlessly embarked on the journey of faith towards the unknown. He even believed the unimaginable promise from "zero" to "innumerable," and lived a life that is justified by faith. Are we willing to follow Abram's footsteps, to trust in the promises of God and to obey His guidance, no matter how arduous the circumstances are?

APPLICATION: Try examining your life. Are you facing any "impossible" challenges? Put all these in God's hand, and let Him be your shield as you face the unknown future.

Challenges:

MEMORY VERSE: "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Passage: Genesis 15:7-21

February 12

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 15:7-21 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Amorites" (15:16) are natives of the land of Canaan

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 15:7-21 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How did The LORD answer Abram's doubt about His promise of blessing? Why do you think God answered in such a way?
2. Is it anticlimactic when God foretold suffering (enslaved for 400 years) and death (go to your ancestors in peace and be buried) before His blessing? Why do you think God did it this way?
3. What does the phrase "for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (15:16) tell you about God's grace and mercy?

Genesis chapter 12, 15, and 17 are all important passages regarding the "Abrahamic Covenant." Chapter 12 talks about God's promise to bless Abraham, chapter 15 is where God officially sealed the covenant with blood, and chapter 17 tells of God setting up the mark of the covenant in circumcision. In Chapter 15, God

responded to Abraham's doubt with an indisputable act — making a covenant with him. In the ancient orient, there were various ways to make a covenant; cutting sacrifices in halves, and then having both parties pass between the pieces, symbolized that whoever broke the covenant would end up like the sacrifices. The smoking fire pot and blazing torch were important elements of ancient sacrificial rituals; at sunset, these elements appeared to pass between the pieces to demonstrate that God Himself made the covenant with Abraham. Hebrews 6:13 further explains that God swore by Himself when he made the covenant with Abram, which was an unquestionable affirmation to the dubious Abram.

It is worthwhile to note that God foretold about the descendants of Abram having to be under oppression for 400 years, and Abram would die peacefully before he could see the fulfillment of the covenant. We can learn at least two lessons from this prophecy:

- ① God's blessing does not mean exclusion from suffering; rather, even in the midst of suffering, God would be with us to give hope. And God's promise would certainly be fulfilled in His own timing.
- ② God is a God of grace and mercy. Even with the Amorites, God still gave them time instead of destroying them immediately.

Likewise, today God may not fulfill His plan according to our own schedule. We must trust in God's promise that He will make "everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). In the past, God passed through the sacrifices in the form of a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch to demonstrate His unchanging covenant with Abram; today, is it not also true that through the one time sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are called into the blessing of reconciliation with God? We must patiently wait for God's timing, hold on to His promises, believe in His goodness, surrender to His perfect plan, and wait patiently for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

APPLICATION: Think about the many promises that God has given in the Bible; in your current situation, which one do you need God to assure you of the most? Tell Him!

MEMORY VERSE: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
2 Peter 3:9

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Don't Help God Your Way!

Passage: Genesis 16:1-16

February 13

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 16:1-16 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "The Angel of the LORD" (16:7) is often identified with Yahweh (16:13; 2:12; 31:13), but is distinct from Yahweh (2 Samuel 24:16; Zachariah 1:12). Therefore, the Angel of the LORD is often interpreted as the pre-incarnated Christ.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 16:1-16 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. God already promised to give Abraham descendants from his "own body" (15:4), yet he along with Sarai could not wait for God's timing. How did Abram, Sarai, and Hagar each fail in their lesson on faith (16:1-6)?

Abram:

Sarai:

Hagar:

2. The meaning of "Ishmael" is God has heard ("...for the LORD has heard of your misery" 16:11). Do you have any experience that "the LORD has heard of your misery"? Recount the experience(s) and write down your feeling.

3. God can correct mistakes and turn our lack into blessings. Have you ever experienced such help from God? Please write down your thoughts and feelings from those experiences.

In the legal custom of Abram's days, a barren woman could give her maid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife's child. Within the cultural context, what was done was acceptable, but God's promise should not be discounted; whatever He promised, He would fulfill accordingly. Abram lacked the patience to wait upon the Lord, so he turned to listen to his wife and laid with her maid; and eventually allowed Sarai to mistreat Hagar. As for Sarai, doubted her own fertility, she took it upon herself to get things done her way. And when her maid got pregnant, Sarai became jealous and mistreated her. And Hagar, as a maid, lacked the autonomy to say no, but she should not have despised her mistress when she got pregnant. All three of them apparently acted out of their own selfish desires which were out of line with God's will.

Even though the three of them made a complete mess with God's promise, God still had mercy on them. For Hagar, God heard of her misery, cared for her and her unborn, and demonstrated to her His faithfulness and grace. Likewise, even though Abram and Sarai made mistakes, God did not abandon them. God helped them learn from their failure so that they could know Him better and be trained up in their faith to receive the bigger blessings to come.

APPLICATION: God is still the God who is mindful of and hears the misery of mankind. Let God know of all your struggles, difficulties, and miseries; and He will care for you.

MEMORY VERSE: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

A New Name, A New Beginning!

Passage: Genesis 17:1-14

February 14

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 17:1-14 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Circumcision" is the mark of God's covenant with Abraham; it refers to the cutting of the foreskin from the male genitalia.

In Hebrew the name Abraham sounds similar to "father of a multitude" (of nations).

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 17:1-14 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. In 17:1-2, God's criteria for making a covenant with Abram was for him to "walk before me (God) and be blameless" (There are two commands here: to walk before God, and to be blameless). Even though Abraham was called the Father of Faith, his actions were not all blameless; how then would you understand this requirement of God? (You can start with the sequence of the two commands, and also refer back to Feb. 1 devotion — "You, Too, Can Be Blameless").
2. What is involved in God's covenant with Abram?
3. What is the significance of the new name that God gave Abram?

The Almighty God wanted to re-emphasize His everlasting covenant with Abram, and the message is a continuation from before. As was mentioned earlier, Genesis 12 talks about God's blessings to Abraham, chapter 15 is where God officially sealed the covenant with blood, and chapter 17 talks about God setting up the ceremony of circumcision as the mark of the covenant. Three aspects of this covenant were emphasized here: ① Nations — Abraham would become the father of many nations, nations and kings would come from him; ② Everlasting covenant — God's everlasting covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants, He would be their God forever. ③ Land — the whole land of Canaan would belong to Abraham and his descendants.

One of the main points of chapter 17 is God changing Abram's name (meaning "exalted father") to "Abraham" (the essential meaning is the same, but the pronunciation sounds like the "father of a multitude"). God has promised to make Abraham into a great nation, to make his name great, and to bless him so that he would be a blessing to others. Now the scope of this promise had been expanded even further to make Abraham the "father of many nations." This name fits the description of "I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."

It is worth noting that God's criteria for making the covenant with Abram was for him to walk before God and to be blameless. Even though Abraham was the Father of Faith, his actions were not all blameless. On the one hand, we have stated that being blameless does not mean without fault (as in the case of Noah and Job); it refers to believers making the determination to be obedient to God, to mind their actions, and to follow Him always. On the other hand, Genesis 17 reminds us that for one to be blameless, one first has to walk before God — being monitored, guided, and protected by God (note that it is not to walk ahead of God). When we are willing to walk before God and to surrender to His guidance, we could then live a holy living that is pleasing to Him.

APPLICATION: Make the determination to walk before God — to be monitored, guided, and protected by God so that you could live a holy living that is pleasing to God.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Appendix: Comforts in Suffering

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."
Matthew 11:28

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:6-7

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
John 14:27

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."
2 Corinthians 4:8-9

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."
Psalms 23:4

"Who (God) comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."
2 Corinthians 1:4

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."
Psalms 23:4

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