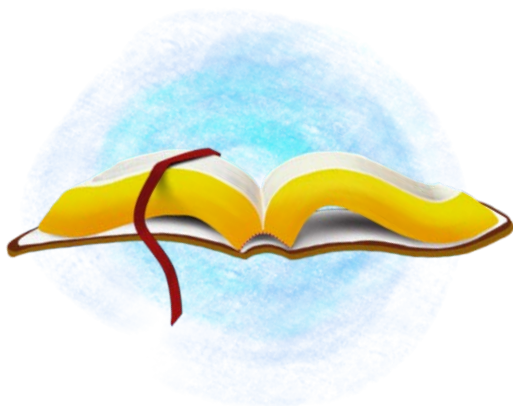
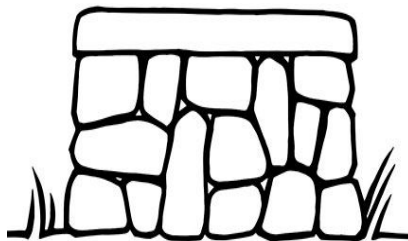


Abraham • Isaac



"Know the Bible, Fear the Lord"

2017 February (15-28) 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.

After changing Abram's name, God changed Sarai's name to "Sarah," meaning "princess," which implied that she would become "a mother of a multitude of nations." Abraham's statement "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing" seems to convey a feeling of helplessness. It was like he was saying in his heart, "Really? A mother of nations? I'm already a hundred years old and Sarah is ninety. I dare not hope that we'll get to have a baby! I'll be content if Ishmael will remain alive and well!"

After the test of a long wait, Abraham was puzzled about the possibility of Sarah's bearing a child at her age. He concluded that any descendants from himself would be coming from Ishmael. Thus, we can see that even the Father of Faith had his moments of doubt; but God did not take back His promise because of Abraham's lack of faith. Thirteen years had passed between 16:16 and 17:1, yet God had not forgotten His covenant with Abraham. God even reaffirmed His promise to him, established circumcision as a sign of the covenant, and told him specifically that his son, Isaac, would be born exactly one year later.

Even though Abraham had his times of confusion, he followed God's commands — by faith he circumcised Ishmael and all the males in the household. Through Abraham's experience, we can learn at least two lessons: ① Things that seem impossible to us are not impossible for God. Do not let our weak faith limit God's work in our lives. ② Whenever we begin to doubt God's leading, we need to remind ourselves that He always keeps His promises, and He executes with perfect precision and perfect timing. We should fully trust and follow His guidance.

APPLICATION: Were there times when you struggled with doubt or even felt disappointed with God? Write down those parts of your spiritual journey and ask God to strengthen your faith.

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 Snicker to Laughter

Passage: Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

February 16

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 18:1-15 & 21:1-7 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The "three men" were not ordinary people; they were God's messengers. Two of them were angels, and the third person was distinguished as the Lord Himself (18:10, 13, 17, 22...). He is probably the "angel of the Lord" described in Genesis 16:7, that is, the pre-incarnate Christ. (Please refer to devotion notes on 2/13).

Abraham practiced ancient Near Eastern hospitality, as was the custom of his day; his treatment of his guests was probably not because he knew the identities of the three visitors right away.

"Three seahs" is approximately 22 Kgs.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 18:1-15 & 21:1-7 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the Lord and the two angels were being sent to visit Abraham in this manner?

2. Imagine if you were Sarah, now your husband is 99 years old and you are "past the age of childbearing"; how would you feel about the prophecy of you giving birth to a baby next year?

3. Why did Sarah's "laugh" lead to the Lord's question/rebuke to the couple?

Just imagine, no matter how important the message God is about to deliver to Abraham, does God *really* need to give him a personal visit like this? Certainly not! But God chose to rest, to eat, and to commune with Abraham — an indication that He was eager to let him know that He took His promise seriously. Any woman in Sarah's shoes would probably find it hard to believe such a prophecy — she "no longer experienced the cycle of women" (the literal translation of 18:11) and had a husband who was almost a centenarian. That is probably why God personally delivered this wonderful news. Sarah's snicker was a sign of her lack of faith, yet God's rhetorical question demonstrated once again that He was faithful to fulfill His promises, no matter how impossible they might seem to humans.

Isaac was indeed born one year later, and God had changed Sarah's "snicker" into everyone's laughter ("Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.'" 21:6). God's rebuke essentially declared to the house of Abraham, and to the rest of the world, that His children are to live by faith and not by sight. As in the past, God wants us to learn this "Lesson of Faith." Has there been a time in your life when God has fulfilled a dream or brought into reality something that you thought was completely unattainable? Has God ever let you experience a pleasant surprise in midst of "impossibilities"? Whatever the answer is, hand over all your "concerns" regarding the future to God and let Him turn these "concerns" into laughter in His time.

APPLICATION: Which area of your life do you need to apply this principle of "Live by Faith, Not by Sight"?

MEMORY VERSE:

"For we live by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 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.

The Negotiator

Passage: Genesis 18:16-33

February 17

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 18:16-33 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 18:16-33 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What lessons can we learn from the dialogue between Abraham and God?

2. Abraham continuously negotiated with God, requesting Sodom be spared if fifty righteous could be found, all the way down to 10 righteous. From this conversation, what attributes of God could we see?

In order to save the inhabitants of Sodom, Abraham repeatedly, fearlessly, and earnestly pleaded with God. Throughout the process, we can see a stark contrast between God's righteousness and compassion. On the one hand, God is righteous and just, He "does not leave the guilty unpunished" (refer to Num. 14:18). Because "the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and

their sin so grievous" (Gen. 18:20), He could not turn a blind eye and spare the judgment. On the other hand, God is full of grace and compassion, and does not take pleasure in destroying sinners. He knew there were not even ten righteous man in Sodom, yet, He was patient with Abraham's repeated pleadings for the city. This whole affair gave Abraham the understanding that he could candidly pray to God for anything. Nevertheless, God would answer according to His will.

In Genesis 18:17, the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" This statement shows that God saw Abraham as a friend, and friends must be truthful to each other, with nothing to hide. So God revealed to Abraham about his impending destruction of Sodom. Do you envy this special relationship between God and Abraham? The Bible has repeatedly introduced Abraham as God's friend (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). Do you desire this intimate relationship with God? Even though God is the almighty creator, the ultimate judge, and is worthy of our worship; He longs to have fellowship with man and to reveal His desires to us. And today, we already have this privilege to be God's friend because of Jesus Christ; as John 15:13-14 tells us, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." Let us cherish this special friendship with God, and to establish a close relationship with Him through daily devotion and candid prayers.

APPLICATION: Do you ever feel depressed and feel that God has forgotten you because God's answers to your prayer do not match up with your expectation? May Abraham's plead with God remind us of two truths: ① God longs to have fellowship with us and to be our friend. ② Even though His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, He still wants us to fearlessly and candidly pray to Him and He will certainly accomplish His best plan in our lives. In this coming week, think about these two truths, and be determined to fellowship with God through devotion and prayers.

MEMORY VERSE: "8 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 9 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" Isaiah 55:8-9

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.

Assimilation

Passage: Genesis 19:1-11; 2 Peter 2:6-8

February 18

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 19:1-11 & 2 Peter 2:6-8 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The gateway of a city is the place of business and civil litigation; the fact that Lot was sitting at the gateway means he was someone of significance in the city.

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

1. How would you understand the description of Lot in 2 Peter 2:7-8 as someone "who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men" and "was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard," yet he offered up his daughters in place to be assaulted by the men of Sodom. Do you think he did the right thing? Why or why not?
2. What was Lot's biggest problem in handling the situation with the lawless men?

Even though Lot's intention to save his two guests from danger was good, his response of sacrificing his two daughters to the evil men was unimaginable. What horrible damage this would have done to his daughters physically, emotionally, and spiritually; and

what kind of family and moral education Lot was leaving them. In fact, a man reaps what he sows (Galatians 6:7), the mistakes that Lot's daughters made in the cave later on was more than likely influenced by Lot's actions.

It is evident from the description of Lot in 2 Peter 2:7-8 as someone "who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men", and "was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard", that he did not participate in the evil deeds of Sodom; in fact, he was saddened daily by what they were doing. Yet, his indecent proposal of sacrificing his daughters also reflects that his life had already been assimilated by the evil of Sodom. His standard of right and wrong, as well as his value system, had been compromised. What is scary about the influence of world lies not only in that we are "living in the world," but unknowingly, "the world is living in us." The longer that Lot lived in the ungodly Sodom and enjoyed its comfort and wealth, the more he was assimilated into the ways of the world; thus losing his ability to be a powerful testimony for God. Even though Lot was distressed daily for the sins of Sodom, we do not see any of his action to correct their wicked ways. Likewise, in this evil generation, God does not want us to just be self-preserved and stay clean, but to use our lives to impact lives and to become a blessing to many.

Do you still remember the different descriptions of Lot and Abram? "Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom" (Genesis 13:12), while Abraham "built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the Lord" wherever he went (Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). One, being assimilated by the world, could not bring any positive influence to the place he dwelled; the other, though occasionally stumbled, was determined to live out his faith, thus making everywhere he stayed a place of worship. Who would you rather be?

APPLICATION: Remind yourself to be set apart for God in faith and in deeds, so that others could clearly see that your life is different. Let the fragrance of Christ spread through your life!

MEMORY VERSE: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." 2 Corinthians 2:14

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.

Hold Hands

Passage: Genesis 19:12-22

February 19

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 19:12-22, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Sons-in-law" most likely is a reference to the fiancés of Lot's two daughters.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 19:12-22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Lot's sons-in-law regarded his plea for them to leave the city as a joke. What does this signify? (19:14)?

2. God's angels urged Lot to flee Sodom immediately with his wife and children. Why did he hesitate? And why did the angels take his and his family's hands and force them to leave? What can you learn from this?

About the nature of God:

About the weakness of man:

From the time the angels declared the destruction of Sodom to when they urged Lot to flee from the doomed city, we can sense both Lot's weakness of loving the world, as well as God's unflinching and abundant love. Why was Lot hesitant to leave when he knew that God was going to destroy Sodom? From when Lot first "pitched his tents near Sodom" (Gen. 13:12) to when "he hesitated" (Gen. 19:16), we can see the world's pull on Lot's heart, making it hard for him to part ways with the world. Even more frightening is when the human heart is drawn closer to the world, his influence in the world becomes less significant. We can see this in the response of Lot's sons-in-law, who thought that Lot was joking when he pleaded for them to leave the city of Sodom. Not only was Lot losing influence in the community, he was not even respected within his own family!

Although Lot was hesitant and reluctant to leave Sodom, God patiently and mercifully waited for him, repeatedly providing him with opportunities to escape the doomed city. Imagine the love that Lot experienced as the angels held his family by their hands. This act fully demonstrated God's compassion, grace and mercy for us as humans, who are insignificant, unworthy, and even feeble in our faith. This "hand-holding" episode again proves that God is gracious and loving and will never abandon His children.

As in Lot's situation, are we not also easily attracted by the world, being drawn closer and closer till we can no longer escape? Hold out your hand! Let God take hold of the hands of yours and your family, and set you apart to live an influential life that matters.

APPLICATION: Reflecting on your life, are there situations where you would need God to hold on to your hand? In this coming week (or even longer), try to imagine God holding on to your hand, spending every moment with you as you face every challenge together.

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.

Was It Worth It?

Passage: Genesis 19:23-38

February 20

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 19:23-38 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 19:23-38 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. At first Lot pleaded with the angels to send his family to the little town of Zoar instead of the mountains (19:21-23); yet at the end, he left Zoar on his own and settled in the mountains (19:30)? What can you learn from this?

2. Reflect upon the life of Lot, the "righteous man" (meaning that he knew and believed in the LORD God), and all the things that had happened to his family (his wife, daughters, sons-in-law, efforts and accomplishments, etc.)? How do you feel?

It can be said that Lot, the "righteous man," led a life of unnecessary tragedies. Even though he grew up in a family that worshiped false gentile gods, he was able to follow his uncle Abraham to pursue God's promise, to dream dreams, and to reach for the stars. At the outset, Lot had the unique opportunity to receive abundant blessings — ① being mentored by his uncle who is the "Father of Faith," ② having the "Promise Land" before him for his choosing (Genesis 13:9), and ③ having boundless blessing awaiting him (in Genesis 12:2, God promised to make Abraham a

blessing to others. Those who bless Abraham will be blessed by God, and all people on earth will be blessed through Abraham. As the nephew and protégé of Abraham, it is only natural for Lot to receive much blessing through his uncle). Yet all these opportunities of blessing became the prelude to a nightmare because of one wrong decision. Imagine Lot sitting on the top of the mountain, watching all of his accomplishments (including the many possessions that caused him to go separate ways with Abraham) turn into nothing more than ashes and smoke. And his wife of many years was turned into a pillar of salt because she could not bear to part with the world thus disregarded the angels' warning. Additionally, his daughters, who grew up in a wicked city that shaped and confused their moral standards, chose incest as a way to preserve descendants for their father. As a result, the older daughter gave birth to Moab while the younger to Ben-Ammi; these two sons grew up to be the ancestor of the Moabites and Ammonites, who were the Israelite's biggest enemies. It might seem like Lot's family had escaped and left Sodom, but Sodom had never left them. If Lot were to go back to the many years ago when he "lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom," would he ask the question: "Was it worth it?"

Lot's life philosophy can be categorized as "Not by faith, but by sight" — the polar opposite of Abraham's. It was solely "by sight" that he chose the cities in the plain near Sodom regardless of Sodom's "great sins." It was "not by faith, but by sight" that led Lot to doubt the angels' instruction to flee to the mountains, fearing that he might not have enough time to get to the mountains and would be harmed. Finally, he doubted God's promise of not destroying Zoar, so "not by faith, but by sight," he left the city to hide in the mountains with his daughters, probably fearing that the fate of Sodom would spread to Zoar. Ironically, going around in circles, he ended up just where the angels originally told him to go; going around in circles, he ended up with nothing. Was it worth it?

APPLICATION: Let us learn from the life of Lot so that as we make different decisions in this crooked world, we will be on guard and be careful that we won't be eroded and assimilated by the world. Be determined to guard the truth and principals of the Bible, have faith in God's perfect plan, and trust that all sacrifices and decisions in line with God's way are worth it.

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 Dark Side Of The Righteous

Passage: Genesis 20:1-18

February 21

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 20:1-18 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 20:1-18 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. For the sake of preserving his life, Abraham lied again and did not take good care of his wife. Does his fluctuating faith serve as any reminder?

2. Because of Abraham's lie, Abimelech brought Abraham's wife home and almost committed adultery; nevertheless, God intervened and prevented this great sin. What can we learn from God's intervention?

From 20:13, we can see that ever since God called Abraham to leave Haran, Abraham and Sarah had determined to use this "sister" lie as a way to deal with Sarah's beauty ("when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, '...everywhere we go, say of me, "he is my brother.""). Even as they were following God's will, there was this dark side in their lives. It is hard to imagine how this "Father of Faith," while following God, could secretly and repeatedly sin with his wife, and even shed his responsibility by justifying his action: ① It is the problem of the society ("I said to

myself, 'there is surely no fear of God in this place"), ② I have my explanation, I am not all wrong ("she really is my sister"), and ③ I always do it this way ("everywhere we go...").

Is this not a severe warning for us? We cannot let our spiritual guard down even when we are following God. We may attend worship, Sunday school, fellowship, even participate in ministry, but all these do not preclude us from being tempted to "compromise with the world." Have you ever gone over the speed limit because you were in a hurry to attend church? Have you ever neglected your relationship with God, perhaps even skipped devotion or prayers, because you were too busy with the ministry? How about sharing or teaching some spiritual principles during Bible study or Sunday school when you have not even practiced them? May we learn from the weakness of Abraham and Sarah and stop giving excuses for our mistakes. Instead, let us pay extra attention to the weaknesses that we often fail on, lest we stumble on the same mistakes over and over again.

Furthermore, from God's intervention in protecting Sarah and in delivering Abraham out of his predicament; more so, even when Abraham failed miserably, God still used Abraham's prayer to heal and to save Abimelech's family (20:7, 17); we can clearly see God's abundant grace on His people. Likewise, even when we fail time and again and disappoint God, He is still willing to forgive us and to give us the opportunity to get back up again and to soar like eagles. May we cherish this generous love without bounds and be compelled to pay the price and live an authentic life for God.

APPLICATION: Ask God to expose the dark side of your life and ask for His forgiveness for your intentional or unintentional offenses. Be determined to commit yourselves to live victoriously.

MEMORY VERSE: "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." 1 Corinthians 9:27

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 Race For The Inheritance

Passage: Genesis 21:8-21

February 22

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 21:8-21 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Ishmael should be about sixteen or seventeen years old.

"Mocking" in the original language is the same word as Sarah's "laughter," but here it carries the meaning of contempt and scoff. The Bible did not explain what Ishmael was mocking, but most likely he was mocking Isaac.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 21:8-21 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Sarah get rid of Hagar and Ishmael? (21:9-10)
2. Why did God command Abraham to listen to Sarah to send Hagar and Ishmael away? (21:12-13) Pay attention to God's "because."
3. If you were Hagar, how would you feel?

This passage is full of contradiction and conflicts. Sarah's snicker turned into a joyful laughter at the birth of Isaac, which is how

Isaac's name came about (Isaac means "he laughs"). Yet when Ishmael laughed at (mocked) "he laughs" (Isaac), it turned into Abraham's distress and the sobbing of Hagar and Ishmael. As we think through this race for the inheritance, Sarah was reaping what she had sown. God had already promised Abraham descendants as many as the stars in the sky, but due to her impatience, Sarah went with her own way to get Abraham a descendant through her maid. Yet the result backfired and created endless trouble for herself and others. Likewise, we need to be careful not to walk the same path as Sarah, and to rely on our own way because of our short-sightedness and our lack of faith and patience. Doing so will often cost us more than its worth.

Moreover, the sending away of Hagar and her son was out of line even by the standard of the custom at the time. According to tradition, even if the wife gave birth to a son, the maid and her son by the master should not be sent away. Even though the right of inheritance had switched hand, the right of the maid's son within the home should not be affected. In this case, why then do you think God allowed Sarah to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael for the sake of the inheritance? Genesis 21:12-13 contains two "because" that would help us evaluate this dramatic "race for the inheritance" from the right perspective. First, we have to understand that the way God handles matter is not hinged on who is right and who is wrong, but on the fulfilling of His promise and His will. God allowed for Sarah's imperfect way of handling the situation because He wanted to further confirm Isaac's position as Abraham's descendant. Was God being fair then? Let's look at the second "because," as well as God's concern for Hagar and Ishmael. From the fact that God "has heard" to the details of how God took care of Hagar and Ishmael, along with His promise to and presence with Ishmael (21:20), we can see that even though man's lack of faith and mistakes can mess things up, God is still faithful, compassionate and full of mercy. And in all things God will work for the good of those who love him.

APPLICATION: Recall some of your mistakes in life; first ask for God's forgiveness, then hand these "ruins" over to God and ask Him to work these out for the good of you and those around you.

MEMORY VERSE: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

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.

I Surrender All

Passage: Genesis 22:1-8

February 23

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 22:1-8 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Take your son...sacrifice him there as a burn offering..." : Even though the Canaanites had the practice of human sacrifice, the Bible clearly denounces it, and forbids the Israelite from such practice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5). God used what was most unacceptable in human standard to test Abraham, not to truly demand the sacrifice of Isaac.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 22:1-8 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Try to stand in Abraham's shoes — if you were him, knowing, on the one hand, that Isaac was the long awaited fulfillment of God's promise for a son, and on the other, hearing God's clear command to sacrifice Isaac as a burn offering — how would you feel in your heart? How would you choose? Why?
2. From this passage, how old do you think Isaac was (ref. 22:6)? Would it be hard to have Isaac willingly be sacrificed? Why?

3. In verse 2, God said, "Take you son, your only son...whom you love...", of whom in the New Testament do these descriptions remind you? Why?

It must have been a very difficult three day journey for Abraham. "Why would God take back this long awaited, divinely promised son?" "How could God's promise be accomplished if He takes back Isaac?" "Maybe I should beg God to take something else in his place?" Questions like these would probably come up again and again in Abraham's unsettled and struggling heart. Yet, despite all these questions, Abraham still chose to walk by faith and surrendered. It is especially clear when Isaac asked for the whereabouts of the sacrificial lamb, and Abraham's answer was, "God himself will provide..." Such a confident answer would require the surrendering of human logic and emotion, along with a deep faith in God's beautiful plan. It is probably this outstanding faith and obedience that won Abraham the title the "Father of Faith."

Throughout the whole incident, Abraham was not the only one who had to surrender completely. The word "boy" which is used to describe Isaac (22:5), refers to the age range of a child to a teenager; this word has even been used to describe skilled soldiers (often translated as "young men" or "servant"; it was these "men" [14:24, cf.14:14] who helped Abraham defeat the four kings). According to Josephus, the Hebrew historian, Isaac should be about 25 years old. In any case, Isaac was old enough to carry all the wood needed for burning up a whole lamb (or a person); both his strength and his age are beyond that of a child. Yet, he did not resist his aging father, but was willing to be tied and almost lost his life. Such obedience is not any less than Abraham's sacrifice. From the example of Abraham's faith passing onto Isaac, as compared to that of Lot's family, we are again reminded that we should not neglect setting a spiritual example, as well as establishing the spiritual education at home.

It is worth mentioning that in 22:2, God said, "Take your son, your only son...whom you love...." Does this address to Abraham and Isaac remind you of the relationship between God and His Son — Jesus Christ? Would it touch your heart to realize that even though God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his only beloved son, He

did not hold back His only beloved Son from sacrificing for us on the cross? What amazing love God has for us. Furthermore, the Christ that Isaac typifies is the one being "obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Obedience to God is probably one of the hardest lessons to learn in life, because it entails that we must give up the control over our life — even to surrender completely what we love the most, whether it be someone, something, and even oneself under God's sovereignty. May we learn the lesson of "I Surrender All" from Abraham, from Isaac, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: Reflect upon your life, what areas are you still holding back from God's sovereignty? Tie these things on the altar below, offer them up completely without taking any back.

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 Love With No Reserve

Passage: Genesis 22:9-19

February 24

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 22:9-19 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 22:9-19 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. The Angel of the Lord "provided" for Isaac in his plight, and gave Abraham abundant blessings. All because of Abraham's willingness to not "withhold": "...you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (22:12); "...you have ...not withheld your son, your only son..." (22:16). What insights can you derive from this?

2. After he took the ram and sacrificed it as an offering, Abraham named that place "The LORD Will Provide" (Jehovah-jireh or Yahweh-yireh). Have you ever received God's provision at a time when you needed it most? Write down your experience and feelings.

At first glance, God's command to Abraham seems exceedingly harsh and illogical. However, 1 Samuel 15:22 tell us, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." It is evident that God never intended to kill Isaac, but instead to test Abraham, to see if his faith would lead him to complete obedience without reservation. True sacrifice lies not in the amount of offering we bring to God, but its value is reflected in how much we still tightly clutch in our hands. Abraham's astounding faith stems from a heart that is fully surrendered to the God he revered. Imagine, if Isaac were not the only son whom Abraham deeply loved, Abraham might not have found it too hard to give him up; but Isaac was the only son born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age, Abraham probably prized Isaac's life far more than his own. Yet, his love for God was even deeper, as manifested by his instant and radical obedience, to offer up the only son whom he loved. When Abraham showed himself willing to sacrifice anything for God, Jehovah-jireh came about, and God's provision and blessing came upon him and his family.

Abraham's faith is an example for all of us today. When we go through trials and tough times, rather than asking Him why we are given unreasonable and unbearable trials, we should focus on the character and attributes of God. Let us harbor no doubt that our God loves us to the end, and He has the best plan for our lives! A firm grasp of this truth will enable us to keep on fighting the good fight and to trust that God will chart a new path ahead of us in His perfect timing, even amidst the most tempestuous circumstances.

APPLICATION: Resolve to live a life for God without reservation. Claim the promise that "The LORD Will Provide," no matter how impossible the situation may seem. (You may write down the "impossible situations" you are facing now or may soon face.)

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.

By Faith

Passage: Hebrews 11:1, 8-19, 39-40

February 25

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 Hebrews 11:1, 8-19, 39-40 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: 11:11 — NIV (1984) puts Abraham as the subject, but its marginal note of putting Sarah as the subject is more preferable (NIV [2011], ESV, NASB, KJV all take Sarah as the subject).

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

1. What can you learn from Abraham's journey of faith — from his being called, to going out, to making home in a foreign land like a stranger, to being tested, and to offering up his son? You can answer in a general sense, but it would benefit more if you could draw lessons from each of his life stage.
2. 11:13 says, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised...." Do you feel a sense of futility? Was it in vain for these giants of faith to endure to the day they died and still not be able to see the fulfillment of what they were hoping for? How does the passage resolve this predicament?

Hebrews 11 is a record of heroes of faith who stood out from the rest. The passage repeated the same idea again and again — "by faith." The reason that Abraham responded to God's calling and went wandering without a clear destination, and to march onto this journey of faith step by step and day by day after God's leading, was "by faith." By faith, through hills and valleys, he wandered from place to place, like a stranger living in the land that God has promised him; all because he was able to see through the eyes of faith, transcending time and space, he saw that he was not only a stranger in Canaan, but even a sojourner on earth, looking forward to his eternal homeland. By faith, Sarah, in the midst of impossibilities ("from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants..." 11:12), became the mother of nations. Even though she had her moments of weakness, she had turned her eyes from "the impossible" to "the Almighty God," believing that He is trustworthy ("she considered him faithful who had made the promise 11:11 [NIV 2011]). Also by faith, Abraham passed the most severe test by holding on to God's promise, believing that even if Isaac was sacrificed, God would bring him back to life, for God would surely accomplish what He had promised. As we reflect upon the journey of faith of Abraham and Sarah, we can see that these giants of faith were not perfect; likewise, we should also choose to focus on the unchanging God and His promises in our times of weakness amidst the ever changing environment. Let us hold on to the pierced hand of Jesus as we step out in faith into the unknown future.

Also, in this passage, especially in verse 13 and 39, it is emphasized that these giants of faith did not get the chance to see the fulfillment of what was promised them. This does not mean that they had wrongly trusted God or had missed out; rather, faith had allowed them to extend their eye sight from this life to eternity — looking forward to that "city with foundation" (11:10), the "better country — a heavenly one" (11:16), and "something better" that "God had planned" (11:40). May we learn from these giants of faith and understand that on earth we are but sojourners, witnesses, missionaries, and channels of blessing for God. Let us model after the example of Abraham, using our brief life on earth to spread God's blessing to all those around us.

APPLICATION: Ask God to help you learn the lesson of faith. Remind yourself to switch your focus from this life onto eternity, from the ever changing environment to the unchanging God who loves us.

MEMORY VERSE: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Hebrews 11:6

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.

Even though Abraham was well advanced in years and realized that he could not go find a wife for his son himself, he still considered it as an important decision that would affect the rest of Isaac's life. He did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman because first, God had promised to bless Abraham's family, so he did not want to mix up his blood line with the Canaanites. More importantly, it was because the Canaanites worshipped false gods and idols, so Abraham insisted on having his chief servant go back to his country to find a wife with the same faith (reference 24:31, 50-51; this is also why Moses forbade the Israelites from intermarriage with gentiles). Furthermore, we can see Abraham's great faith from his conversation with his servant (24:7) — believing God as a God of His words, so he could absolutely rely on all of God's plan. From Abraham's requirement, we can also see that having the same faith is a top priority in seeking a spouse.

From the many details of the story, we can also see the servant's faithfulness and his reliance on God. Though at the beginning, he was hesitant (24:5), once he had taken oath with his master, he relied on God every step of the way and faithfully finished his mission. Throughout the whole process of his seeking God's will, we could see the importance of prayer. Many times on the way, the chief servant sought for God's guidance and specific confirmation (24:12-14); and when his prayer was answered, he immediately fell down to worship God and to thank Him for His goodness and guidance (24:26-27). How precious is the example of this chief servant! Due to his fear of God, his unceasing prayers, and his waiting for God's confirmation, he was able to accomplish this important mission.

APPLICATION: In what areas are you seeking for God's will? Put them into God's hand through prayer and ask for God's guidance.

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.

In the account of the servant's search for a wife for Isaac, carried out in Abraham's native land, we can see a consistent theme — the kindness and faithfulness of God. Kindness ("hesed" in Hebrew) is a very important word in the Old Testament, it is used to describe God's everlasting and faithful love (translated as "kindness" in NIV [1984], as "loving-kindness" in NASB and "steadfast love" in ESV). Ultimately, it is this kindness, as repeatedly emphasized by the servant, that delivered the event. Upon finishing the declaration of God's love and guidance, the servant called upon Rebekah's family in 24:49 to show him "kindness" and to grant the marriage as a response to the "kindness" that God had shown to Abraham.

Moreover, we know that biblical authors would not waste precious writing space. Therefore, the recorded events — from the servant's repeated declaration of God's blessings on Abraham, to the reason he was sent on the mission by Abraham, to the conviction about the angel's accompaniment, to his encounter with Rebekah by the well, and to God's guidance thereafter — must be very important. At the outset, the servant wanted everyone to wholeheartedly agree to this marriage. He wanted them to understand Abraham's background and his blessings from God, his godliness, and his wishes. He wanted them to see God's plan, His guidance, His fulfillment and His confirmation. Through this he wanted to convince Laban that marrying off Rebekah to Isaac was the will of God. But more importantly, upon the servant's very real experience of God's miraculous guidance, he could not help but to "spill his guts" about the wondrous things that God had done for him. As Jesus said in Luke 19:40, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." For those of us who have personally experienced God and His grace, how can we not testify His grace in our lives?

APPLICATION: Have you felt God's marvelous guidance and His everlasting, faithful love in your life? Please write down these experiences and try to share with others (do not let the stone beat you to it!)

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.

Monthly Reflection

Passage: Psalm 30:5

February 28

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

QUIET DOWN: Use one to two minutes to quiet down yourself, try not to think about anything. If light music (without lyrics) helps, you could play some light music to help you focus.

PRAYER AND MEDITATION: Ask God to calm your heart, then read aloud Psalm 30:5, slowly and repeatedly (you may repeat it three to five times or more, but avoid rushing through it). As you read, try to pay attention to specific words, moods or feelings, or any particular thoughts that speak to you between the lines. Use the above Bible verses or your respective insight as a beginning prayer of today's reflection.

**"For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may remain for a night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning."**

Psalm 30:5

YOUR FEELINGS:

REFLECTION: Please meditate quietly and answer the following questions and prompts.

1. Please count and write down the various situations that you experienced God's grace in your life in the past month.

2. In your daily words and deeds, are there areas that you need to improve on?
3. In establishing your daily devotions as a habit, what are some areas that you need to improve?
4. Other reflections:

PRAY: Ask the Lord to grant you strength to live out what you have learned today.

Appendix: Lessons In Faith

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

Luke 17:6

²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Mark 9:23-24

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:5-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psalms 37:5

...and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Romans 9:33

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

Matthew 21:22

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,

Psalms 16:8-9

If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

2 Timothy 2:13

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