



GENESIS

CREATION ORIGIN BEGINNING

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Introduction & Overview

Studying the Book of Genesis

A Whole New World

The book of Genesis is simultaneously one of the most important, but also least understood, books in the entire Bible. In it we learn some key things about God, the human race, and the world we live in. The whole book is meant to frame and to shape every aspect of how we view ourselves and the world around us. Its assumptions are intended to become *our* assumptions.

At the same time, it was written in a culture and at a time that is separated from our own by *millennia*. And this is part of the problem: we tend to read our own cultural assumptions and questions back into the text, failing to see the significance of the questions that it was wrestling with in its own time. This has led to a great deal of confusion about this book and how we are supposed to read it.

As such, there are a couple of things that are important to note about Genesis before you dive into this study with your small group.

Structure: Primordial History and Redemptive Plan

In this study we will just be looking at the first twenty-three chapters of Genesis, which can be roughly broken into two distinct sections:

Genesis 1-11: Primordial History

The first eleven chapters are sometimes called the “primordial history” of Genesis. They cover a **vast** swath of time, starting before creation and going all the way up to the time of ancient Mesopotamia. The central focus of this section could be summarized as, “How the world was made and why it’s so messed up.” It starts with God creating everything with beauty and order and design, but then chronicles how a rebellious humanity broke it and the downward spiral that this creates.

Genesis 12-23 (and 24-25): The Beginning of Redemption

Chapter 12 then zooms in on one specific family over a much smaller period of time: the family of Abraham. From this one family, God promises that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). It marks the beginning of God setting out to redeem what was broken and rescue what has been lost. The story of Abraham and his descendants is the central story of the rest of the Bible, with God’s promise to Abraham ultimately reaching its climax in the arrival of Jesus.

To learn more about the structure of Genesis, watch the overview videos for [Genesis 1:11 & Genesis 12-50](#) from *The Bible Project*.

Literary Style: Jewish Meditation Literature

The book of Genesis, as with much of the Old Testament, is what is known as Jewish Meditation Literature. What we mean by this is that it was intended to be read and reflected on over and over and over again. To simply read it once and set it aside would be to miss the point. The more you read it, the more you learn.

Furthermore, it is devoid of many of the details we expect to find in today's stories and narratives. What that means is that the details that *are* there are extremely important and will often appear over and over again throughout the book. They serve as markers, drawing our attention to what is most important for us to understand. So you will have to pay attention to things like repeated words and phrases, images and metaphors, parallelisms and progressions. Likewise, poetic structures are often woven throughout a narrative in order to draw out important points and details. To simply read it as a modern day history book or biography would be to miss these intentionally artistic details and, thus, the whole point of the book.

As such, do not rush your way through this book. Slow down and note the details. It will be helpful to mark up your copy of the text with highlighters, pens, or colored pencils to help you notice the things are found there.

It is also helpful to not just read it one small story at time, but to try and read several large chunks in a sitting, as the repetitions and ideas become that much more pronounced. Then, go back and read the smaller sections to really see how they contribute to the overall picture.

To learn more about how to read this kind of literature watch the video [How to Read Ancient Jewish Meditation Literature](#) from *The Bible Project*. You can also watch their video series [How to Read the Bible](#), which introduces you to several other important approaches for reading Scripture in its original context.

Cultural Context: Against Rival Creation Stories

It is important to remember that Genesis was written *long* before Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and our modern debates around evolution. As such, it was not addressing many of the questions that modern people have about our origins. Rather, it was addressing the questions that *ancient Near Eastern* people had about our origins.

In the Ancient Near East there were countless rival creation stories from groups like the Canaanites, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. And while these different groups each had their own origin stories, they had some features in common. Some of these features include:

- A war between the older gods and the younger gods, with a great Sea Dragon or Sea Goddess serving as the ultimate foe. The stories end with the younger gods triumphing over the older gods in battle and then creating the universe out of the body parts or remains of the old gods.
- Humans beings are created as an afterthought by the young gods to serve as slaves and servants who would provide food for them in the form of sacrifices.
- A temple being erected at the climax of the creation story in which humans could meet with the gods and offer up their sacrifices.
- How the gods became the national deities of the particular people group telling the story (whether Egyptian or Babylonian, etc), and their relationship to the gods of other people groups.

Against these creation myths, Genesis 1 & 2 tells a **very** different story even while co-opting some of the same imagery. Here are the big differences:

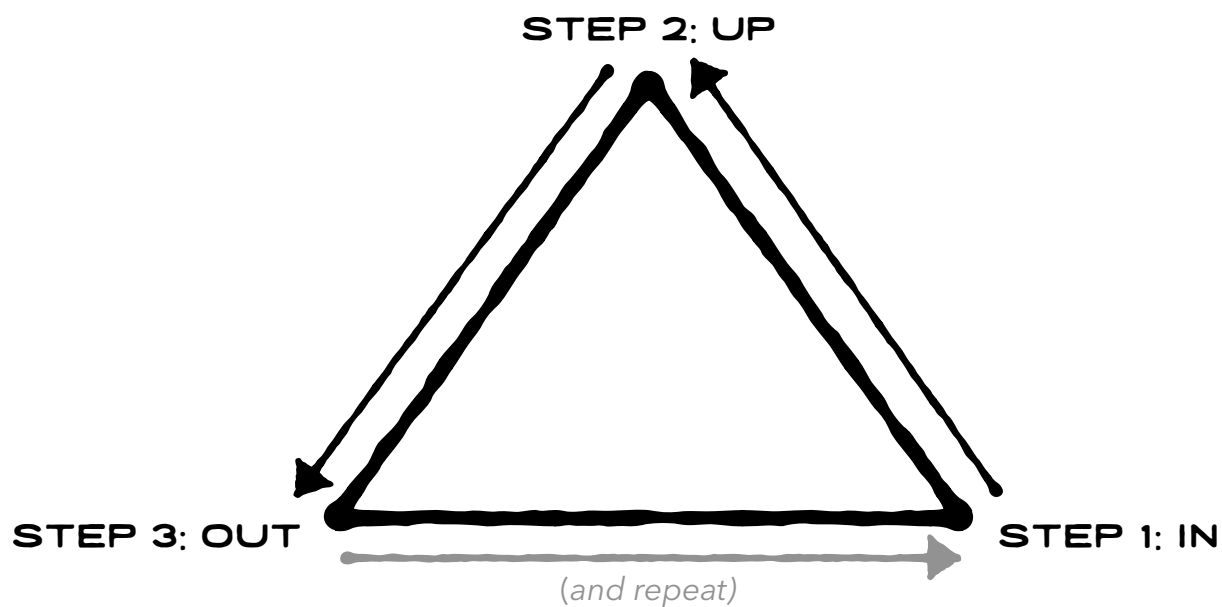
- There is no war or conflict before creation. There is no great Sea Dragon to be overcome. Yahweh has no rivals. He has always existed and, by the sheer power of His Word, speaks all of creation into being with beauty, order, and design.
- Humans are **not** an afterthought, but are made in God's own image and called to rule over and care for His creation alongside Him.
- There is no temple, because God desires to dwell in **all** creation with His people. We find Him resting and delighting in His creation on the seventh day (see Gen. 2:1-3) and walking in the Garden of Eden with the first humans (see Gen. 3:8).
- There are no rival gods or national deities. Yahweh is THE God over all nations and peoples on the face of the planet.

These features are vitally important to keep in mind when reading Genesis, especially its early chapters, as this avoids many of the conflicts that we tend to have between science and the Bible. By reading Genesis on its own terms we allow it to speak to us about God's purposes and reasons for His creation, while not getting bogged down in the methods for exactly how or when these things happened; questions which modern people tend to ask, but which the biblical authors simply weren't as interested in answering.

To learn more about how to read Genesis in its original cultural context and how to make sense of it on its own terms we recommend reading [How To Read Genesis](#) by Tremper Longman III.

How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide is structured to help you not only study the book of Genesis itself, but also apply it to your daily life. As such, each session is structured with the same flow and is designed to help emphasize three kinds of key relationships that are essential for our discipleship as followers of Jesus. They are:



We call this the Biblical Equipping Model in that it centers around studying God's Word (UP), in community (IN), for the sake of living it out in our lives (OUT). Each move has a focus and some key questions that go along with it.

STEP 1: IN (Connecting with one another through sharing)

Goal: To share and celebrate how we lived out the life application(s) from the previous week

Key Questions:

- How did you look, live and love more like Jesus since the last meeting?
- Where did you see or share Jesus this past week?
- How did your application from the previous week go? What did you learn about yourself, God, or others?

As a leader, you will also want to remind them of the vision for why we do small groups and set-up what you hope to gain from your gathering in this week's session.

STEP 2: UP (Connecting through God's Word)

Goal: To explore the content, context, and implications of God's Word.

Key Questions:

Content: What does God's Word *say*?

- Read the text out loud and pray
- Make sure you ask another core member or an apprentice leader to do this

Context: What did God's Word *mean for its original recipients*?

- What is the setting of the passage? (Read through it several times and the paragraphs surrounding it).
- What patterns, themes, repeated words, or images are emphasized in the text? Why might these have been important?
- How does this passage fit into the bigger picture of the book it is a part of? (Note the chapters right around the passage you are studying).
- How does this passage fit into the larger storyline of the Bible? (Note where this book is located in the context of the wider Biblical narrative).
- What was the original intent of the passage? (Who was it written to, when, and under which circumstances? What did the author want his original readers to understand? What cultural insights are important to understand as we read it?)

Implications: What does God's Word *mean for me*?

- Why is this text important for me? Is there something that it speaks to in my life? (Look for commands to obey, warnings to heed, or encouragements to take to heart. If reading a narrative, are there characters to emulate? Mistakes to learn from?).
- What should be different in my life as a result of this passage? How would my life look different if I were to take this passage seriously?
- How is this passage intended to nurture my faith and walk with Jesus?

STEP 3: OUT (Connecting to the Mission by Living Out Our Faith)

Goal: To determine how God's Word applies to daily life and concretely helps us look, live, and love more like Jesus.

Key Questions:

- What are we going to *do* about the implications of God's Word?

Tough Stuff

Along the way you will encounter boxes like this entitled "Tough Stuff". These boxes provide you with important notes on how to handle challenging passages and difficult to interpret portions of the text as you move through your study.

- What known opportunities do you have coming up this week to look, live and love like Jesus?
- Try to get really concrete and specific here. What will you do, by when, and with whom? How can we encourage you and hold you accountable to living this out?

REPEAT!!!

Make sure you have noted what application you are all putting into practice and be ready to circle back to it both throughout the week and during the IN portion at the beginning of your next group meeting.

What You Will Need

To get the most out of this study, you will need a couple of things on hand to help you:

- A copy of the [Genesis Scripture Journal](#), so that you can take notes and mark up your copy of the text as you study with your group
- Some highlighters, colored pencils, or colored pens so that you can highlight and identify common themes and patterns as you study
- This study guide to help you dive into the passages and ask questions of the text

In addition, here are other helpful resources you may want for your own reference as you work your way through this text:

- [How To Read Genesis](#) by Tremper Longman III
- [NIV Application Commentary: Genesis](#) by John Walton
- [Overview: Genesis 1-11](#) & [Overview: Genesis 12-50](#) by the Bible Project
- [The Book of Genesis: Part 1](#) and [The Book of Genesis: Part 2](#) by the Bible Project
- [How to Read the Bible playlist](#) by the Bible Project
- [Genesis Overview Poster](#) by the Bible Project

Life in Paradise

Genesis 2:4-25

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

As this is your first study in the book of Genesis, take some time to get to know each other. Go around and introduce yourselves and then share what you are hoping to learn through this study of Genesis.

Once each person has had a chance to share, sound off on the following question:

What is your definition of 'paradise'?

You could refer to a favorite vacation spot, a past memory, or even an ideal that comes to mind when you hear the word 'paradise'. What makes that place/memory/idea a paradise for you?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our first study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

After the cosmic scope of Genesis 1, where God creates the entire universe with beauty, order, and design, we zoom in to a much more intimate picture. In Genesis 2 we learn about the creation of the very first human couple and their relationship with God.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 2:4-25 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on

Tough Stuff

Two Creation Stories?

It is easy to think that Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25 are telling two different creation stories.

The key phrase to note is what we find in Genesis 2:4 "these are the generations..." Typically this phrase would introduce a genealogy, showing the resulting generations that came from a person or couple.

What is interesting here is that this is showing what the result of the creation account in Genesis 1 is. In essence it is saying, "This is what developed as a result of creation in Genesis 1." As such, Genesis 2 is intended to be read as a more intimate, detailed explanation of what we find in the overview of Genesis 1:1-2:3.

their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. Take a closer look at the creation of the first human being in verses 7-9 and 15-17. What can you infer about God's relationship with the first man based on this description?
2. What images or descriptions about the garden¹ of Eden stand out to you most? Why? What would it have been like to live there?
3. In verses 16-17 God issues his first command to Adam. Why do you think God placed these two trees in the garden? What choices might these two trees represent?
4. What do verses 15 and 19-20 tell us about humanity's role and responsibilities in God's creation? What implications might this have for us today?
5. In verse 18 God says, for the first time in Genesis, that something is "not good". What does this tell us about the importance of relationships for us as human beings?
6. What do verses 20-23 reveal about the nature of the woman? How does Adam's reaction in verse 23 show his delight and appreciation for her?
7. What do verses 20-25 reveal about God's intention for marriage? What implications does this have for other human relationships as well?

Tough Stuff

Bad Knowledge?

Many people have struggled with God's command in verses 16-17, wondering why it would have been bad for humans to have knowledge.

However, two things are worth noting: 1) it is not knowledge in general that is prohibited. It is the knowledge of good *and* evil, the latter of which God is concerned about. 2) The Hebrew understanding of knowledge is more than just acquiring information about something, but truly experiencing it. God's concern is that they will not just know about evil, but experience it.

¹ Literally the word "paradise" in the Greek version of the Old Testament. The original word in Hebrew referred to a well-tended place for growing herbs and fruits, as with a royal garden found in the palace of a king.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

What we see in Genesis 2 is a beautiful depiction of the world as God intended it: a place of beauty and abundant life, free of pain, shame, and death. Furthermore, we see what God intended for human beings as His image bearers: that we would live in a trusting relationship with Him and a loving relationship with one another, using our gifts to steward and care for the world He has made. It is a picture not only of what once was, but of what will be again when Jesus comes and “makes all things new” (see Revelation 21 & 22).

In light of this, there are several applications that we can make. Below you will find a couple of options. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) Good Stewards

Genesis 2 reminds us that everything we have is a stewardship from God, intended to be used to foster greater flourishing in the world around us. What area of your life could use greater stewardship? What practical step might you take in using your gifts and talents in that area to bless and care for the world and others around you this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 2) Made for Each Other

Genesis 2 teaches us that we *need* deeper relationships with others around us. What is one relationship that could use your attention at this time (a friendship, your marriage, a family member, etc)? What has made that relationship difficult? What would it look like to invest in that relationship in way that blesses and shows honor and dignity to the other person this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 3) Do You Trust Me?

This passage shows us that, when it comes to our relationship with God, we are to love and trust Him above all else. That is what the two trees represent: will we trust God or will we go our own way on our own terms? How about you? What is one area of your life in which it is difficult to trust God? How does seeing the love and care that He gives to His people in Genesis 2 address your fears, doubts, and concerns? What would it look like to trust Him with this portion of your life this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Tough Stuff

Second Class Citizens?

Some have read the phrase “helper fit for him” as granting women a secondary status. It is worth noting that the Hebrew word for ‘helper’ is the word ‘ezer, which is used in reference to God Himself in Psalm 54:4 where we read “Surely God is my helper.” It does not denote a secondary status at all, but rather the perfect aide for what we lack.

The picture painted in Genesis 2 is of a perfect and complementary partnership between man and woman as they serve as co-equal stewards over God’s created world.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Genesis 4:1-26

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

Last week we got a snapshot of what life was like in paradise and what it means to live in relationship with God and with one another. Take some time to begin this week by checking in on how you lived out your faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our second study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

After last week's study in Genesis 2 it didn't take long for God's good creation to fly off the rails. Rather than trusting in God and caring for His creation as He intended, the first human beings chose to go their own way, rebelling against God and trying to seize power, authority, and knowledge on their own terms. The result was that they were not only banished from paradise, but that all of creation was broken as a result (see Genesis 3:17-18). Pain, division, and death have entered the world.

But God didn't entirely give up on His creation nor on His image bearers. He promised that one day an offspring would come of the woman who, at great personal cost, would vanquish evil once and for all (see Genesis 3:15).

But things are going to get worse before they get better, and that is where our study for today picks up. Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 4:1-26 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. In verses 3-5 the children of Adam and Eve bring offerings to God. What is the difference between their two offerings? (Hint: it is not that Abel brought steak while Cain brought salad. Take a closer look at how the gifts are described).
2. What do their offerings reveal about their relationships with God and about how they view Him?
3. The phrase “its desire is contrary to you” in verse 7 is the exact same wording and grammatical construction found in Genesis 3:16. What does it reveal about what anger can do to human relationships if left unchecked and unaddressed?
4. What do God’s words to Cain in verses 6-7 reveal about God’s heart for Cain? What lesson does He want Cain to learn?
5. How does Cain’s reaction to God’s counsel affect his relationship with Abel (see verses 8-9). What does this reveal about the connection between how we view and treat God and how we view and treat other people?
6. Take a closer look at verses 10-16. Where do you see mercy in God’s response to Cain? Where do you see judgment? How does it match the nature of his crime?
7. Verses 17-24 recount the story of Cain’s descendants. What patterns do you see in what is described?
8. Authors Charles and Anne Hummel, in reflecting on this story, write that “The lifestyle of Cain’s family is a picture of humanity: technical progress matched by moral decline.”

Where do we see evidence of this in our world today?

9. Where do you still find hope in this story? Where do we see evidence that God is still at work to bring about His plan of restoration? What hope does that give *you* in a world that is often broken by the same patterns of anger and violence that we find in this text?

Out: Connecting w/the Mission

The story of Cain and Abel shows the downward spiral that began in Eden and is now playing out in the subsequent generations of humanity. Unchecked anger and unaddressed sin can lead to dire consequences in our relationship not only with God but also with people who are made in His image. Cain's rebellion continues to mark not only his life, but the lives of his descendants. Yet God is still at work, moving His plans to redeem the world through Adam and Eve's offspring, even in the face of such violence.

In light of this, there are several applications that we can make. Below you will find a couple of options. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Your Anger

In Ephesians 4:26–27 Paul writes, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil” (ESV). In Cain's story we see how unchecked anger can lead to unchecked sin. What is currently making you angry? How is it affecting your relationships with other people? What would it look like to voice that anger in a healthy way, give it over to God, and seek reconciliation with others? What practical step can you take in doing that this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 2) Love God, Love Others...or else...

There is a story of a Lutheran bishop who suffered under the Nazis in Germany saying, “When God is not God, man is not man.” His point was that when we reject God it inevitably leads us to act inhumanely toward those made in His image. How does your view of God shape your view of others? Are there ways in which a broken or distorted image of God has led to a breakdown in your treatment of others? How might knowing God's love and mercy shape your approach to other relationships in your life? What would it look like to extend that love and grace to someone else this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 3) The Proof is in the Offering

Cain's offering revealed a lack of love and trust in God. What we give to God often reveals the status of our hearts. Jesus himself said, "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Take a moment to evaluate your own generosity. What might this reveal about your level of trust in God to provide for you? What changes, if any, might God be calling you to make in terms of your generosity? What steps could you take in growing in generosity this week? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 4) Hope in the Darkness

Sometimes, when we encounter suffering and brokenness in the world it can be hard to see where God is still moving. Yet even in the midst of this dark episode from Genesis 4, God is still at work moving His plan of salvation forward. In what ways have you had a hard time seeing God lately? How does knowing that He already has overcome sin and death through Jesus give you hope in the midst of the brokenness? Are there ways in which He is continuing to invite you to trust in Him in the midst of the mess? Share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Great Ambitions, Tiny Towers

Genesis 11:1-32

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week we read about the downward spiral of brokenness that led to anger and violence in the generations after Adam and Eve. Yet, we were also encouraged to look for God in the darkness and address the unchecked sin in our own lives. Take some time to begin this week by checking in on how you lived out your faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our third study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

Since the time of Cain and Abel things haven't gotten much better. In fact, they got a *lot* worse. Human wickedness became so pervasive that "the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). So God decided to start over by wiping the earth clean with a flood. Yet He did not entirely give up on His creation nor on His image bearers. He saved Noah and Noah's family, as well as His creation, by carrying them through the flood in the ark.

Sadly, humans continued to follow their own plans and desires, forgetting God's calling to follow Him and care for His creation. That brings us to our passage for this week.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 11:1-32 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. Take a closer look at verse 4. What is humanity's motivation for building this tower?²
2. How does this compare with what God calls human beings to do in Genesis 1:27-30? How does it compare with God's instructions to Noah after the flood (see Genesis 9:1-2 & 7)?

Tough Stuff*Why a Tower?*

In the ancient world, towers or ziggurats, were "designed to provide stairways from the heavens (the gate of the gods) to earth so that the gods could come down into their temple and into the town and bring blessing."² It was not for the people to get in to heaven, but to compel the heavens to come down to earth.

3. What does this reveal about humanity's view of and relationship with God at this point?
4. In verse 5 we read that the "LORD came down to see the city and the tower." The phrase in Hebrew literally means that He had to stoop down to see what was happening. In short, from God's perspective the tower really wasn't all that impressive. So what problem does God have with this endeavor (Hint: look both at what humanity's motivations for building the Tower are as well as what God both says and does in response).
5. Why do you think humanity's attempts at unity continue to fall short of what God desires?
6. How does His response continue to move His salvation plan forward, even while addressing humanity's ongoing rebellion? Where do we still see glimpses of hope in this text?

² Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, electronic ed.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Ge 11:4.

7. Take a close look at the genealogy in verses 10-26. How does it differ in scope from the other genealogies that we have encountered in Genesis thus far? What might this indicate about the focus and trajectory of God's redemptive plans from this point onward?

8. Chapter 11 marks the end of the first section of Genesis. Looking back on what you have studied, what have you learned about God? About His character and priorities? What has been most meaningful to you so far?

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

In chapter 11 we see that humans are still trying to make a name for themselves on their own terms rather than receiving their identity and purpose from the God who made them. The result is that they try to create a monument to their own vanity, ironically, in the very place that the later city of Babylon would be built. Throughout the rest of the Bible Babylon becomes virtually synonymous with the broken human desire to create our own empires in opposition to God. But God won't let His plan to restore creation (or us) be thwarted and is preparing a new start with a new family with a new calling.

But before we move into the next portion of Genesis it is important to take stock and apply what we have learned to our own lives. Below you will find a couple of possible applications that we can draw from this text. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) What Is Your Name?

It is tempting to try to find our identity and purpose in things other than God: relationships, money, career, respect, comfort...you name it. Unfortunately, none of these will truly satisfy us. Why? Because we were made in God's image and it is only in Him and His purposes that we will truly find our worth, dignity, and purpose. In what ways are you attempting to make a "name for yourself" in your own accomplishments? How might this be getting in the way not only of your own fulfillment but of God's purposes and plans for your life? Take some time to confess these things and ask God to help you find your ultimate identity and purpose in Him. Take some time to share this with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 2) Oneness...Not Sameness

In Revelation 7:9 we see a picture of where real human unity is to be found: in our love for and partnership with God. Though representing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, they

find themselves together, worshipping before the throne and before the Lamb as one united humanity. What it shows us is that oneness is not sameness.

Sadly, in Genesis 11 we see how humanity oftentimes tries to achieve unity on the basis of sameness rather than oneness; dividing ourselves along racial, cultural, or socio-economic lines, and resisting the call to include others. Not only does this work counter to God's plans and purposes, but can become the basis for ever greater forms of division and wickedness. Where do we see evidence of this in the world around us? In what ways is God calling you to be an agent for reconciliation between people groups? How does sharing the love of Christ with others, across differences, paint a more compelling and fuller picture of God and His love to a world that is divided along racial, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic lines? Take some time to pray that the Church would be faithful in its calling to make disciples of all nations and look for ways to live out that calling in your own life this week.

A New Beginning

Genesis 11:27-12:9

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week we read about how humanity's rebellion against God continued even after the Flood. Yet, God is not done with His creation and we were invited to reflect on what it means to find our identity in God and our oneness in His salvation. Take some time to begin this week by checking in on how you lived out your faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our fourth study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connect w/God Through Scripture

As the first movement of Genesis comes to a close in chapter 11 it looks as though there is little hope of restoration in the face of humanity's stubborn pride and rebellion. But the chapter ends with a glimpse of hope. After the sweeping wickedness of humanity, the story suddenly shifts focus and zooms in on one family line: the family of Terah, whose son was Abram.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 11:27-12:9 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. Take a moment to put yourself in Abram's sandals: if God asked you to leave all that was familiar (home, country, family, friends, etc) and go to an unknown place that He would later show you, how would you feel? What questions would you have? What would hold you back? What would lead you to move forward?

2. Take a closer look at verses 2-3. What specific promises does God make to Abram?

3. How might these promises address Abram's fears and doubts? Maybe make a list of the promises and consider what specific issues each one addresses.

4. Think back to what you have studied in Genesis 1-11. How do these promises echo ideas or themes from earlier in the Genesis story?

5. What do these promises reveal about God and His priorities? What do they reveal about His attitude toward Abram?

6. Take a closer look at the rest of the story. What additional words of encouragement does God give to Abram as he travels?

7. Twice in this short story it says that "Abram built an altar to the Lord" (vv. 7 & 8). Take a closer look at what it says about these altars in those verses. Why might Abram do this? What does it reveal about his relationship with God?

Tough Stuff

Altar Building

Altars function as sacrificial platforms. Their construction can also mark the introduction of the worship of a particular god in a new land. Abram's setting up of altars in each place where he camped defines areas to be occupied in the "Promised Land" and establishes these places as religious centers in later periods.

**see comments on Genesis 12:6-9 in The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament.*

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

After the colossal failure of humanity in Genesis 3-11 God is ready to start fresh again; not by wiping humanity off the face of the earth, but by calling *one* family to follow Him and, through this family, to bless all the nations of the earth. His desire is, ultimately, to restore all of His creation, but it begins in this humble place with an unlikely couple called to a world-changing task.

The rest of the biblical story follows the family of Abram down through the centuries to the one who would, ultimately, bring salvation to all the families of the earth: Jesus Christ. He is the true and greater Abram, who would leave His Father's house at great personal cost to bring blessing to all the people of the earth. And we are heirs of that promise as well.

So let's take a few moments to reflect and apply this story to our own lives. Below you will find a couple of possible applications that we can draw from this text. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) I Promise...

Sometimes following God's call on our lives can be scary. Abram was called to leave everything familiar to follow God. Likewise, Jesus calls us to take up our crosses to follow Him (see Matthew 16:24). But what we see here is that God not only calls us to follow Him, but promises to go with us and provide us with everything we need to face our fears. What difficult thing is God calling you to do as you follow Him? What fears are holding you back? How does knowing that He is with you comfort you in the face of those fears? Share with a partner and pray for one another that you would be able to rest in God's promises and follow Him in faith.

Application 2) Altar Call, Round 1...

Altars were outposts of God's kingdom. To set up an altar sent a message to others about the God we worship and what it means to follow Him. In short, they were signposts pointing people to God. In what ways has God called you to serve as a signpost pointing other people to Jesus? How does knowing that God's desire is to bless "all nations" motivate you to share your faith with others? Maybe share with a partner about who you are currently praying for and reaching out to. Invite them to join you in praying for this person, that he/she would be open to hearing about Jesus through you and for open doors to do so.

Application 3) Altar Call, Round 2...

Altars also served as reminders of God's faithfulness. They were places people could return to in order to remember His goodness and meet with Him. Think back to specific times God has been faithful to you. How does remembering those moments give you comfort and courage now? Share with a partner and pray for one another.

My Plans vs. His Promises

Genesis 16:1-16

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week we read about the calling of Abram to follow God and God's plan to bless "all the families of the earth" through him (Genesis 12:3). We also considered what it means for us to follow Him. So before we dive into our next study, let's take some time to check in on how we lived out our faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our fifth study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connect w/God Through Scripture

In last week's study we saw how God has called Abram to follow Him in order to bring blessings to all the families of the earth. Abram is the starting point of God's plan to save His lost and broken world. But like Adam and Noah before him, Abram is far from perfect. And in our story for today we see what happens when we allow *our* plans to get in the way of *God's* promises.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 16:1-16 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. It has been roughly 10 years since Abram and Sarai have entered into Canaan. Take a close look at verses 1-2. What does Sarai suggest and why? What is her reasoning?

2. Take a close look at the second half of verse 2. How does Abram respond? Whose voice is Abram listening to? In light of Genesis 12:4, 13:18, and 15:6 what is significant about this?
3. What does this plan suggest about their relationship with and trust in God?
4. Look at verses 4-6. What happens in the relationships between Abram, Sarai, and Hagar as a result of following through with this plan? In what ways does this reflect the breakdown in relationships between people that we encountered in Genesis 3 & 4? What does this tell us about the effect sin has on human relationships?
5. Look at verses 7-10. How does God respond to Hagar's plight?
6. In light of the harshness and injustice that Hagar faced at the hands of Sarai, why might God tell Hagar to return? Considering the environment and the context of the Ancient Near East, what other fate might He be trying to protect her from?
7. Look at verses 13-16. What has Hagar's encounter with God shown her about Him and His character?
8. How does God continue to provide for and watch over Hagar, even in the midst of her affliction?

Tough Stuff

Slavery?! Seriously?!

This passage is a difficult one for modern readers. It is important to remember that not every story in the Bible is a "hero" story. It is brutally honest about the harsh realities of human sin and the injustices that result.

We must remember that God does not endorse slavery. As we learned at the very outset of the book of Genesis, God made men and women in His image. As such, He views them with equal value and dignity. Furthermore, because of Jesus, "there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). Likewise, Paul's letter to Philemon reveals that those called slaves in the ancient world were to be loved and treated as family by God's people.

So what's going on here? In the ancient world slavery was common and these kinds of arrangements were the norm. Women were especially vulnerable to being sold into slavery. Female slaves were viewed as property and could be used to secure legal heirs if their mistresses were not able to have children of their own. It was a horribly dehumanizing practice.

But this was not God's plan. He previously said that the promised child would come from Abram and later affirms the child would be his and Sarai's own child.

This story is actually intended as a warning about what happens when we follow the ways of the world rather than trusting in the promises of God, and the violence and injustice that can result when sinful humans take matters into their own hands.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Genesis 16 is a messy story, with human selfishness and wickedness on full display. Rather than trusting in God's timing and ways, Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands by following the ways of the world rather than the ways of the Lord. The result leads to injustice, broken relationships, and pain. Yet God is a God who sees the plight of the oppressed and does not abandon them in their afflictions. Rather, He comes to them, cares for them, and watches over them even in the midst of painful, harsh, and broken circumstances. Furthermore, He continues to move His plan of redemption forward, ultimately bringing His Son forth in a way that no one expected; born to a poor virgin from Nazareth in a far flung corner of the Roman Empire to a people who were themselves conquered and enslaved. Yet, through Him God's salvation and freedom from Sin would be given to all people who put their trust in Him.

Tough Stuff

Strange Blessings?

God's words to Hagar seem strange. What kind of blessing is this. The reality is that it is not a blessing at all. Rather, it is simply a foretelling.

God affirms that He will continue to watch over Hagar AND her son. Ishmael will eventually be free, but though he is Abram's firstborn he is not the son of promise that the Lord would bring. Nevertheless, God would continue to care for him (see Genesis 17:18-21 & 21:8-21).

As we consider our own calling as Christians, let's take a few moments to apply this story to our own lives. Below you will find a couple of possible applications that we can draw from this text. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) My Plans vs. His Promises

In Genesis 16 Abram and Sarai end up taking matters into their own hands when God doesn't show up on their timetable or in the ways they desired. How can our own impatience with God's ways or timetable lead us to unbelief or even outright disobedience? What worldly shortcuts are you currently tempted to take as a result? Perhaps you can even think of something in your own life that has made this temptation particularly strong. Take a moment to reflect on this, repent, and ask God to strengthen your faith in the midst of these temptations. Maybe share with a partner and have him/her pray over over.

Application 2) Seen & Heard

In the midst of life's challenges and suffering it can be easy to feel as though God is not there. Yet what we learn from Hagar's story is that God both sees her and hears her. In short, He knows exactly what you are going through and promises never to leave you or forsake you. What currently struggles do you face that have left you feeling abandoned by God? How does knowing that He is with you and will not abandon you give you comfort even in the midst of your difficult circumstances? How does knowing that Jesus has faced suffering and death for

you - and overcome them both - give you hope even in this challenging season? Share with a partner and pray for one another.

Application 3) Addressing Injustice

What we see in this story is that God's eyes are on those who have been oppressed and taken advantage of. In the midst of Hagar's affliction God says that He "has listened to your affliction." Do you have the same eyes that see the oppressed, the outcasts, and the victims in our world? What steps might God be calling you to take in alleviating their suffering and offering protection, hope, and support in the midst of our broken world? Maybe brainstorm one thing that you and/or your group can do together to serve them intentionally. You could plan a service project, partner with a local organization, or give to a charity that is seeking to support those in need. Put together a plan, pray for one another, and then step out in faith to partner with God in bringing His love and healing to His world.

Speaking of Judgement...and Mercy

Genesis 18:16-19:29

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week we read about the damage that can be caused when we put our plans before God's promises. But we also saw how God is faithful to care for and protect those who face suffering and injustice. So before we dive into our next study, let's take some time to check in on how we lived out our faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our sixth study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connect w/God Through Scripture

In last week's study we saw how Abram still has a lot to learn about God's will and God's ways. In our story for today we will see just how much Abram has started to learn about God's justice...and His mercy.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 18:16-19:29 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.³

1. Take a close look at verses 18:16-19. Why does God share His plans with Abraham? What does this reveal about the hopes He has for him?

³ Several of the questions in this session have been adapted from *Genesis: God's Creative Call* by Charles & Anne Hummel (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

2. Examine the dialogue between Abraham and the Lord in verses 20-33. What does it reveal about Abraham's attitude toward the cities? About his relationship with God?
3. What does this dialogue reveal about God's attitudes toward the cities and *His* relationship with Abraham?
4. Now take a look at verses 19:1-9. What do that actions of the people of Sodom reveal about why they are under God's judgment?
5. Look at Lot's response to the crowd in verses 19:7-8. What does it reveal about how he has been influenced by living among the people of Sodom?
6. Look at verses 19:14-22. How has life in Sodom also affected his family?
7. How is God's mercy evident in His treatment of Lot and his family?

Tough Stuff

The Sin of Sodom

Much has been made of this story down through the centuries. What exactly was the sin of Sodom? Homosexuality? Attempted rape?

The answer is actually given in Ezekiel 16:49-50: "Now this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and complacent; they did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them, as you have seen." The answer, in short, was that they rebelled against God and, therefore, mistreated other humans who are made in His image. Their actions toward Lot and the angels of the Lord were just one expression of their thoroughgoing wickedness.

Trying to just pick out one sin and make it worse than the others is to miss the point of the story. Sodom is a case study of what happens when we consistently and arrogantly turn our backs on God. It leads us to take advantage of people made in His image as nothing more than means to our own selfish ends.

And we see in Lot's reaction that, when we spend too long in that state, it can affect us as well. For more on this see Romans 1:18-32.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is an infamous one in the Bible. It is literally where we get the phrase "hellfire and brimstone" from. And yet, upon closer examination, what we find is that God's first desire is to show mercy, not judgment, and that He desires to save even someone as unworthy as Lot. Yet He also does not let wickedness go unpunished forever. It is a story about the tension that exists between God's justice and God's grace; a tension the Abraham has come to understand as he willingly stands in the gap and pleads on behalf

of the cities before the Lord. Furthermore, it is a foretaste of what God's greater Son would ultimately come to do by satisfying God's justice and giving God's grace by taking the punishment that we deserved onto His own shoulders. For "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

As we consider our own calling as Christians, let's take a few moments to apply this story to our own lives. Below you will find a couple of possible applications that we can draw from this text. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) How's Your Intercession?

In Genesis 18 & 19 we begin to see a little spark of hope for Abraham; he is beginning to understand God's heart and His mercy. So much so that he pleads for and intercedes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. In what ways can you intercede with God on behalf of your city, state, and country because of its sins? How might this kind of prayer affect your attitude and actions toward those around you? Take a few moments to do this now with a partner, and look for ways this week to pray for others and demonstrate God's mercy.

Application 2) Watch Where You Pitch Your Tent...

Earlier, in Genesis 13:12-13, we learn that Lot pitched his tents near Sodom. By the time we get to this passage he has moved into town and settled among them. And the effects of his stay there are evident in how he behaves in this story. In an effort to protect his guests he offers up his daughters. It shows just how thoroughly twisted his sense of right and wrong have become. And we, too, are vulnerable to being influenced in the same way. As someone who likewise lives in the midst of a sinful world, what specific warnings does the passage have for you? What words of encouragement? How might God be calling you to live *differently* and what *mercies* has He promised to help you when you stumble? Share with a partner and pray for one another to remain people who are "in the world, but not of it" (see John 17:11-26).

Application 3) A Friend of God...

Abraham has the distinction of being one of the few people in the Bible called a "friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7 | Isaiah 41:8 | James 2:23). And in this passage we begin to see why. He has finally begun to understand God's heart for the lost and for the world, and speaks to God face-to-face about it. How in touch with God's heart for the lost are you? Who has God placed in your life that you are called to pray for and reach out to? When was the last time you spent time with God, getting back in touch with what He cares about most? Take some time to reflect on these questions and make a plan to take some time talking with God this week. Share this with a partner and pray for one another before you wrap up your study.

The Greatest Test

Genesis 22:1-19

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week saw how Abraham is starting to grow and learning about God's heart for mercy as well as His commitment to justice. Furthermore, we were invited to consider how we, as God's friends, are called to live differently and intercede on behalf of our broken and fallen world. So before we dive into our next study, let's take some time to check in on how we lived out our faith last week.

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our seventh study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connect w/God Through Scripture

Abraham's story is now coming to a climax. His journey with God has been marked by many detours, speed bumps, and false starts. But God has continued to walk with Abraham and teach him His ways. But there is one last test that Abraham now must face.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 22:1-19 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. Take a close look at verse 2. What words and phrases emphasize the difficulty of the task that God gives Abraham? How would you have felt being in Abraham's sandals at this moment? What feelings, fears, and questions would come to mind?

2. Look at Abraham's response in verses 3-10. What do his words and actions reveal about his trust in God?
3. Look at verse 12. What does it mean to "fear" God based on what Abraham does in this story?
4. In verse 8 Abraham tells Isaac "The Lord will provide for himself a lamb..." How does God provide in verses 13-14? What does this reveal about God?
5. What promises does God reaffirm in verses 15-18? How does these confirm and strengthen the faith that Abraham demonstrated in this encounter?
6. Three times in this account God calls Isaac, "your son, your only son, whom you love" (vv. 2, 12, 16). Think ahead in the Bible. Where else does a similar phrase appear? What is the connection between these passages? (Hint: If you need help look at the following passages: Mark 1:9-11 & 9:7, Matthew 3:16-17 & 17:5, Luke 3:21-22 & 9:35, John 3:16).
7. Why might God ask Abraham to undertake such a test? Why would this have been so important?

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

In Genesis 22 Abraham is presented with a choice: will he clean to everything he could've hoped for in the world or trust in God? After a lifetime of seeing God's faithfulness in action, Abraham responds with trust...and is not disappointed. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." God provides the sacrifice Himself, sparing

Abraham's son and fulfilling His promises to bring blessing to the whole world through Abraham's descendants.

Perhaps more than any other story in Abraham's life it is here, in Genesis 22, that we see most clearly what God would ultimately do through Jesus. Like Isaac, Jesus too carried the wood of sacrifice on His back up the mountain. Calvary was in the vicinity of Moriah. For Jesus Himself is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This episode in Abraham's life shows us that our faith is rightly placed in the God who loves us, sacrifices for us, and will deliver us even in the face of death.

Let's take a few moments to apply this story to our own lives **but before you do** read Romans 8:31-39 together. How does knowing that, in Jesus, God was willing to give *His* Son, His only Son, whom He loves, for you give you comfort as you following Jesus?

Then, take a moment to apply this story to your lives. Below you will find a couple of possible applications that we can draw from this text. Pick one that stands out to you and your group and discuss how you will put this into practice in the coming week. Then, when you gather together at your next meeting you will start with sharing how you lived this out over the last week.

Application 1) The Lord Will Provide

Take a moment to read Romans 8:31-39 with a partner. This passage reminds us that God is still the God who provides for us, and we can know this because *He* gave His Son, His only Son, whom He loves for us. Just as God provided a sacrifice in place of Isaac, so He provides Jesus as a sacrifice for you. How does knowing that Jesus came, died, and rose again for you help you to face life's challenges and difficulties? What hope does this give you in your current season of life? Share with a partner and pray for one another. Then, take time this week to reflect on this passage and note the ways that this hope sustained you. Come ready to share a few of those "hope-filled moments" next week.

Application 2) God or His Stuff? (version 1)

The great question facing Abraham was, "Are you following God for His sake or only for His blessings?" This final test was intended to bring him face-to-face with this question: would he continue to trust God even when it seemed like the blessing was on the line? Abraham showed where his trust truly lay: in the God who, despite all appearances, *would* remain faithful to His promises. So what about you? Are you only following God when times are good and life is #blessed? Or do you cling to Him even when it seems like everything else is falling apart? Take a moment to name something you are clinging to right now that you know God is calling you to let go of in order to follow Him. What is making the "letting go" difficult? How does knowing that "the Lord will provide" give you comfort? Share with a partner and ask

him/her to pray for you, that your trust in God will grow and that you will be able to step out in faith and follow Him. Then, take a step to let go and trust God this week. Come back ready to share next week. If you need your prayer partner to check in with you this week, don't hesitate to ask.

Application 3) God or His Stuff? (version 2)

The great question facing Abraham was, "Are you following God for His sake or only for His blessings?" This final test was intended to bring him face-to-face with this question: would he continue to trust God even when it seemed like the blessing was on the line? Abraham showed where his trust truly lay: in the God who, despite all appearances, *would* remain faithful to His promises. So what about you? Are you only following God when times are good and life is #blessed? Or do you cling to Him even when it seems like everything else is falling apart? Describe a time when following God meant you had to give up something you loved. How was God faithful to you through it all? How has that helped you walk faithfully with Him even in hard times? Share with a partner and pray for each other, that you would follow Him and trust Him no matter the circumstances.

Outposts of the Kingdom

Genesis 23:1-20

IN: Connecting w/One Another

Last week Abraham's story reached its climax with the ultimate test of his faith: would he trust God or simply cling to the blessings? And we were encouraged to reflect on what it means to trust God in every area of our own lives. Before we jump into this last study in the book of Genesis let's take a moment to revisit our applications from last week:

- What was the application you chose? How did it go?
- What did you learn about God, yourself, and others by putting your faith into practice?
- Where did you see Jesus this past week? Where did you share Him with others?

Once you've had a chance to share, it's time to dive into our seventh study in the book of Genesis...

UP: Connect w/God Through Scripture

In Genesis 22 Abraham showed us what true faith looks like; trusting in God no matter what we might be facing. In our study this week, we come to the end of Abraham and Sarah's story as the Genesis narrative begins to turn toward Abraham's children and grandchildren.

Take a moment to pray before you dive into your study. Then, have someone in your group read Genesis 23:1-20 out loud while the rest listen to the passage.

After listening to the text read aloud, take a few moments to individually read through the text, highlighting or underlying key words, ideas, images, or repeated phrases. Note any connections that you find between this text and previous portions of Genesis.

Once your group has taken a few minutes to study the text on their own, bring everyone back together and dive into the text.

1. Take a close look at verses 1-6. How do the Hittites react to Abraham's request to purchase a tomb for Sarah? What does this reveal about the reputation Abraham has built among the people in that land? What does it reveal about the reputation he has built FOR GOD among them?

2. Look closely at verses 7-16. Why do you think Abraham insists on paying for the field? What message does this send to the people?

3. In Genesis 13:14-15 God told Abraham that, one day, he and his offspring would receive the land. How does this story reaffirm Abraham's confidence in this? In what ways does this first field serve as an "outpost" for God's Kingdom promises?

4. Given that this is your last study in the book of Genesis as a group, look back on all the promises that God has made to Abraham and Sarah over the last 11 chapters. Which promises have been fulfilled, either in part or in full?

5. What have you learned from the life of Abraham about what it means to have faith in God?

6. What have you learned about God's character? What does it mean to have a relationship with Him?

Tough Stuff

What's the Deal w/the Land
 Land was a precious commodity in the Ancient Near East. To understand the significance of this arrangement, it is worth noting what the editors of the *Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* say about this exchange:

"Arable land was so precious a possession that it was not supposed to be sold to anyone outside the kinship group. The lack of a buyer within the family and/or the practicalities of business sometimes required a sale to an unrelated person. This could be legally sidestepped through the adoption of the buyer or the intercession of village elders on his behalf with the owner. The designation of Abraham as "a prince" suggests he would be a desirable neighbor. The offer to receive the land as a gift was refused by Abraham because that would have enabled Ephron's heirs to reclaim the land after Ephron's death."

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Our study of Genesis has come to an end, but God's story of salvation continues. After the downward spiral of humanity's pride in Genesis 3-11, Abraham's story shows us what it looks like to follow God in the midst of a broken world and how God is faithful to His promises, even when we are not. This stumbling journey of faith continues to move forward not because Abraham was perfect, but because God is faithful. What began with Abraham to establish outposts of the Kingdom eventually brings us to the story of Jesus: the one who is greater than Abraham (John 8:58). We are heirs of this story and, likewise, called to follow God, trusting Him and in all He has done for us.

For your final application time consider one or more of the following applications...

Application 1) Called to Follow

Like Abraham, Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow Him. What does that mean for you in your current season of life? How have these lessons from the life of Abraham encouraged you to take new steps of faith? What has still been holding you back from trusting in God? Share this with a partner. If you are having a hard time trusting God in some specific area of your life take a few moments to read through Psalm 23 together. How does knowing that, as with Abraham, God is also *your* good shepherd give you both comfort and courage to follow Him?

Application 2) What's in a Name?

In Genesis 11 (the Tower of Babel) we see what happens when we try to make a name *for ourselves*. God's promise to Abraham was that *He* would make his name great (Genesis 12:2). In what ways have you been tempted to place your identity in something other than God? What name are you trying to make for yourself? How does knowing that, in Jesus, you are *claimed* and *named* by God Your Father help you put your trust in Him? Share this with a partner and pray for one another that you would live out of your identity and a loved and sent child of God.

Application 3) Building Outposts

Abraham's calling was to become a blessing to the nations, and everywhere he went he built altars and created outposts for the Kingdom. He prayed for the people and the cities in the land. And he walked with God in ways that caused those around him to call him, "a prince of God among us." From him would eventually come Jesus, the one who came so that "whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:17). As children of Abraham and followers of Jesus, we too are called to live lives that point people to Jesus. How is God calling you to serve as His ambassador (2 Cor. 5:17-21) where He has placed you? Who are you praying for? Who are you reaching out to? What next steps will you take in these relationships? Take a moment to share this with a partner and pray for one another as you live out your calling to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).