



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Genesis, Part 1

Theme: Faith That Pleases God

Overview: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). In this unit, students will look at four early examples of faith in Genesis: Abel's gift, the faithful walk of Enoch and Noah, the prayer of Abraham's servant, and Abraham's obedience. They will learn to give God their first and best, to walk with him, to pray with confidence, and to obey him faithfully.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

Genesis does not name its author, but Jewish and Christian tradition credit Moses with writing it as the first of the five books of the Law. Jesus and the New Testament writers refer to the Law as coming from Moses (Luke 24:27; John 5:46).

Audience

Genesis was written for the people of Israel, to tell them how God created the world, how sin entered it, and how God began his plan to save the world through Abraham and his family.

Date

Many conservative scholars believe Moses wrote Genesis during Israel's years in the wilderness, around 1440–1400 BC. The events it records stretch from creation to the death of Joseph in Egypt.

Setting

The lessons in this study move from the fields east of Eden, where Cain and Abel brought their offerings (Genesis 4), to the world before the flood (chapters 5–9), and then to Abraham's call from Haran to Canaan, his test on Mount Moriah, and his servant's journey to Nahor to find a wife for Isaac (chapters 12, 22, 24).

Theme

Faith that pleases God. Hebrews 11 holds up Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham as examples: "By faith Abel brought God a better offering," Enoch "was commended as one who pleased God," Noah built an ark "in holy

fear," and Abraham "obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:4–8).

Why Study Genesis?

These early stories show that God has always been pleased by faith. This study calls believers to give God their first and best, to walk faithfully with him every day, to be confident that he hears their prayers of faith, and to obey him and experience his rich blessings.

STUDY CONTENT

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|----------------|-------------------------------|
| WEEK 1: | Genesis 4:2–16 |
| WEEK 2: | Genesis 5:21–24; 6:8–7:1; 9:1 |
| WEEK 3: | Genesis 24:7–9, 40 |
| WEEK 4: | Genesis 12:1–7; 22:15–19 |

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **By giving of our first and best we exhibit a pleasing faith like Abel.**

STUDY: Genesis, Part 1

THEME: Faith That Pleases God

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 4:2-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 11:4; Proverbs 3:9; Leviticus 22:20, 21;
Mark 12:41-44

A GIFT OF FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD (ABEL)

BY MARK SCOTT

Things went downhill fast after the serpent deceived our first parents in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve failed to trust the goodness of God and embraced a culture of death. Sin can cause even our best gifts and worship to be tarnished (Isaiah 1:12-15; 64:6). No one found that out more than Cain, the first “named-in-the-Bible” child of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1). Legend says that Adam and Eve had 33 children.

Contrast

Genesis 4:2-5a

The grace of God is seen in that, while death was spreading through the earth due to sin (Romans 5:12), Adam and Eve still co-created life with God. Abel (his name means “breath”) was born. But Cain and Abel could not have been more different. Like other brothers in the Bible (Genesis 25:19-28; Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 15:11-32), these two were a study in contrast.

One difference between the boys was their occupations. Abel watched flocks and Cain tilled the soil. But the contrast in our text goes beyond occupation. Worshiping God through sacrifice became deeply embedded in the human psyche after the fall of humankind. We seem to know intuitively that something needs to be done to bridge the God-human gap.

Each son brought his gifts to God. God *looked with favor* (mentioned twice in our text and meaning “to have regard for” or “to gaze upon” or “to respect”) on Abel’s offering but not on Cain’s offering. What made the difference? The Bible doesn’t say, though it does give some hints. Was Abel’s gift “better” because it was a blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22; 11:4), though grain offerings were acceptable in the Old Testament? Was Abel’s gift acceptable because it was from the first fruits of his flock (Proverbs 3:9)? Was Cain’s offering not acceptable because it had some kind of blemish (Leviticus 22:20, 21)? Was Cain’s offering not sufficient because it cost him little (Mark 12:41-44)? Was Abel’s offering more acceptable because his deed was righteous as opposed to that of his brother (1 John 3:12)? All we know is that the brothers were as different as the gifts they offered.

Confrontation

Genesis 4:5b-9

It would seem that Cain was upset with God and took it out on his brother. (This often happens. Fred Craddock said, “Anyone at war with himself will make casualties out of his loved ones and friends.”) Cain was very *angry* (kindled, hot, or grieved) and his face was *downcast* (fallen).

Similar to Jesus confronting Judas (see John 6:70, 71; 13:27-30; Matthew 26:50 and note that “friend” is not a term of endearment in Matthew), God tried to shine a bright light in Cain’s eyes to get his attention. The confrontation consisted of four questions. God interrogated Cain about his anger issues, his countenance, and his volition. After Cain murdered Abel God confronted Cain about the absence of his brother.

But even in the midst of this interrogation God held out the prospect of grace to Cain. If Cain would *do what is right* (mentioned twice) he would be accepted. Maybe God had more confidence in Cain than Cain had in himself. God challenged him to realize sin’s *desire* (only elsewhere in Genesis 3:16 and Song of Songs 7:10; see also 1 Peter 5:8) and challenged him to *rule* (reign or exercise dominion) over it.

But Cain would have none of God’s coaching. Even God could not talk Cain out of murder. In a very premeditated act he murdered Abel. The fourth question of confrontation was, “Where is your brother?” Cain’s question back to God could be sarcastic or even accusing. In either case, “Am I my brother’s *keeper* (watchman)?” was lame.

Curse

Genesis 4:10-16

Because sin continued, God’s curse continued. It would only be removed through Christ (Galatians 3:13). But again there is grace in how this curse is dispensed. The *ground* (mentioned three times in the text) took the hit more than Cain did. The ground *cried* (called) out, swallowed blood, and resisted growth due to Cain’s sin. Cain would have to “wander” (to stagger or be a fugitive) the earth to make a living.

Cain was overwhelmed by this prospect. He felt that his *punishment* (fault or iniquity) was more than he could bear. He was convinced that because he had committed murder that someone would murder him. But God’s mercy was once again in evidence. God put a *mark* (sign or signal) on him to spare him from being murdered. He went and lived in the east (where God’s people in the Bible went when they were in trouble).

In this New Year let us avoid the “way of Cain” (Jude 11) and instead offer gifts that please God like Abel’s did.

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THOSE DAILY STEPS OF FAITH

BY DAVID FAUST

Naaman was a valiant military commander, but he suffered with leprosy. He traveled to Israel, hoping the God of the Hebrews would heal him; but when Naaman arrived at Elisha's house, the prophet didn't even bother to step outside. Instead, Elisha sent a messenger with odd-sounding instructions: "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan." Elisha's response offended Naaman's dignity, and the proud soldier left in a huff. He expected Elisha to do something flashy—say a prayer, wave his hand, produce an instant cure. Dip seven times in the muddy Jordan River? What good would that do?

Naaman's servants, however, reasoned with their irate boss. They asked, "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?" Naaman heeded their wise advice. As his humility increased, his anger subsided. (Funny how that happens!) When Naaman humbled himself and dipped seven times in the Jordan, "his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (2 Kings 5:1-14). God's ways are always right, even when they aren't as glitzy as we expect.

I have a bit of Naaman's attitude inside my own heart. What about you? Many of us carry around a set of assumptions about what God should do and how he should do it. If the Lord required "some great thing," the challenge might inspire us. But what about the unspectacular little steps of faith God asks us to take on a daily basis? It's fine to approach God with mountain-moving requests, but do we appreciate the hills he's already moved? Why should God give us big blessings if we aren't grateful for the little ones? Dreamers fantasize about winning the lottery and giving millions of dollars to charitable causes, but are we faithful and generous with the modest salaries we already earn?

Once in a while, faith requires bold risks and giant leaps. More often, it requires routine choices and small sacrifices no one notices except the Lord. Whether your

faith is the size of a mustard seed or a bowling ball, what will you do with it? How does faith affect your daily life?

Faithful in Small Things

Cain and Abel had a lot in common. They shared the same DNA and attended the same tiny family reunion. Both of them had the opportunity to honor God with an offering derived from the fruit of their daily work. But the differences between the two brothers were enormous. Abel approached God with sincere faith (Hebrews 11:4), while his brother's motives were evil (1 John 3:12). Resentful and bitter, Cain tried to sidestep responsibility with a famous question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

A wise person observed, "Life is hard because it's so daily." Jesus said his disciples must "take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). That's often where faith plays its most valuable role—in our daily routines. Faith should shape the way we approach ordinary situations, not just the extraordinary ones. On a daily basis, faith should move us to put service above self, choose God's will over self-will, and prioritize the needs of our brothers and sisters over our own.

Faith moved Abel to give God his best. On every ordinary day, we can do the same.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Think back on the Christmas presents you have just given. Which one do you think was appreciated most by the one receiving it? What made it an especially good gift?
- The adage that we should give until it hurts has been countered with the command to give until it feels good. For you, what makes the difference between painful giving and joyful giving?

Read Genesis 4:2-5a

1. What was God's evaluation of the offerings of the two brothers (vv. 4b, 5a; Hebrews 11:4)? Although a reason for this difference is not explained, how might these verses clarify the contrast: Proverbs 3:9; Leviticus 22:20, 21; Mark 12:44?
2. Some commentators look back to Genesis 3:21 to speculate that God might have previously explained what constituted an acceptable sacrifice. Explain how killing an animal to make coverings could relate to verses such as Hebrews 9:22.
3. Understanding that Cain and Abel probably would have bartered with each other for what each produced, how does the availability of animals to both change the focus from Cain's unacceptable offering to his unacceptable attitude toward God?

Read Genesis 4:5b-9

4. Review God's questions to Cain in vv. 6, 7. How might Cain have answered these inquiries?
5. We usually think of sin as actions we take or refuse to take. How does the description of sin in verse 7 differ from that explanation? Explain how sin can take an active role in corrupting us (John 8:34; Acts 8:23; Romans 7:11).

Read Genesis 4:10-16

6. Compare the situations surrounding God's question in Genesis 3:13 and in Genesis 4:10. What curses resulted in each case? What did God do to mitigate the consequences of the curse on Cain?
7. Consider the statement, "How we give affects how we live." Evaluate your own attitudes toward your offerings to God. What changes might happen in your life if your giving were more joyful?

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Walk with the Lord and experience his goodness and blessing.**

STUDY: Genesis, Part 1

THEME: Faith That Pleases God

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 5:21-24; 6:8–7:1; 9:1

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 11:5-7; Micah 6:8; Psalm 101:6

GOD IS PLEASED WITH A FAITHFUL WALK (ENOCH AND NOAH)

BY MARK SCOTT

Chapters 4 and 5 of Genesis contrast. Genesis 4 is filled with ugly things (murder, pride, and regret). Genesis 5 is filled with good things (long life, faithfulness, prayer, and comfort). Years ago Wilbur Smith and Wilbur Fields marked these two chapters out as the two great lines of humanity (*Old Testament History*). Those lines, the way of Cain and the line of Seth, continue with us today. We see them as the people of God and the earth dwellers (see the Book of Revelation), Israel and the nations, and the church and the world.

Both biographies in today's lesson are from the line of Seth, walking faithfully in the life-giving ways of Genesis 5. Enoch's narrative is brief. Noah's narrative is extended. It is like Moses took the last name in the faithful list (Genesis 5:32) and provided a detailed narrative of it. But both men *walked faithfully* (go, come, proceed, live in a certain manner) with God. The idea is to be in fellowship with and obedience to God.

Short Epitaph; Quick Exodus

Genesis 5:21-24

This Enoch is the seventh generation from Adam and a descendant of Seth (not Cain's first child of Genesis 4:17). His name means "dedicated one" or "one trained up." Even though Enoch did not live that long (a mere 365 years), he had longevity on both sides of him. His father Jared lived 962 years, and his son Methuselah lived the longest of anyone at 969 years. God enjoys rewarding obedience with long life (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

Two things were remarkable about Enoch. First his epitaph was short, and his exodus from this life was quick. His epitaph was one phrase. He *walked faithfully* (mentioned twice in this brief text and also used of Noah in this next section). That is a short phrase but a whole sermon. God blessed this man with a large family (Psalm 127:3-5). Second, his departure from this earth was unusual. Similar to Elijah, Enoch's end was more of a translation than a death (see 2 Kings 2:11, 12).

Large Narrative; Long Obedience

Genesis 6:8-7:1; 9:1

As near as we can tell, Noah's name means "comfort." His obedience would bring creation comfort. Four chapters are devoted to the story of Noah and the flood (Genesis 6-9). He is also referred to in 10 other Bible books besides Genesis. He was highly regarded by God

(Ezekiel 14:14, 20). In contrast to the rest of the world (Genesis 6:1-7), Noah found *favor* (acceptance or grace) in the eyes of the Lord. His long obedience did not earn God's favor, but he did please God with his faithful walk.

Noah's noble character showed up in at least three ways. First, two adjectives described him. He was called *righteous* twice in this text. This word meant "to conform to a standard" or "abide by the law." He was also called *blameless*. This word means "without blemish" or "entire" or "complete." Second, his life stood in stark contrast with the rest of the world. Verses 12 and 13 underline how bad Noah's environment was. Three times the word *corrupt* was used. The word meant "to be marred or spoiled." The world was full of *violence*. This expression meant "cruelty or injustice." Finally, Noah was perfectly obedient in building the ark according to the instructions that God had given him—the type of wood, the sealant, the size, the roof, the window, the door, and the decks. Noah also obeyed God regarding the occupants—his wife, his three sons and their wives, specified numbers of clean and unclean animals, and food to store for everyone.

God judged the world for its disobedience through a flood. God would destroy the people and the planet. (These are not unrelated as Romans 8:20-25 makes clear.) The floodwaters would destroy all life under the heavens and every creature that has the breath of life. The phrase that is daunting is, "Everything on earth will perish." No wonder Jesus related this judgment of God to the one that will yet come (Luke 17:26, 27).

But all was not lost. God would establish his covenant with Noah and his family. Hope lives as long as God is merciful and people walk in faithfulness. The mandate of Genesis is repeated. "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." God is reiterating his plan to save the world through Jesus, and he will do so through the walk of a faithful servant.

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TAKING A WALK WITH OUR FATHER

BY DAVID FAUST

Sit, stand, walk. All three of these verbs picture our relationship with the Lord.

Sitting sounds restful, safe, and secure. Ephesians 2:6 says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” What an honor it is to be seated with Christ! The Lord promises his faithful follower, “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

Standing sounds confident and determined. Ephesians 6:13 says, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” A classic gospel song exhorts us, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross.” Christians must resist the devil, “standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9).

The Bible uses another word-picture to summarize the lives of Enoch and Noah. “They walked faithfully with God” (Genesis 5:24; 6:9)—an honorable epitaph for any godly life. In times of moral confusion, you will stand out as a difference maker if you make the Lord your traveling companion. What does it mean to walk with God?

Walking requires movement. It keeps us moving forward and exercising our muscles. When we walk with God, we don’t grow lazy and complacent; we continue growing and taking steps of faith.

Walking with another person requires adjustment. It doesn’t work if one person walks too fast and races ahead while the other lags behind. If we want to walk with God, “let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Walking requires a steady pace. Notice, the Bible doesn’t say Enoch and Noah “ran” with God. They walked. Of course, there are times when circumstances require us to pick up the pace. In fact, the apostle Paul compared the Christian life to running a race (1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7)—but the race is a marathon, not a sprint. Living by faith doesn’t mean something spectacular will happen every day, and it doesn’t necessarily leave us breathless and exhausted. More often, the walk of faith moves us along at a measured pace as we pursue the upward call of God through the ups and downs of life.

Walking with another person enhances communication. It provides an ideal opportunity for meaningful dialogue. Like other first-century rabbis, Jesus often taught his disciples while they strolled along the road. My wife Candy and I take walks together almost every day in a park near our home. Walking together helps us stay in shape physically while we stay in touch with what’s happening in each other’s world. “Walking with God” is an Old Testament way to say, “Pray without ceasing.” Hymnwriters rightly use walking with God as a metaphor for prayer. Remember these lyrics? “And he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own.” “Just a closer walk with Thee, grant it, Jesus, is my plea.”

Enoch and Noah remind us what a privilege it is to walk and talk with God. Life’s journey goes better when the heavenly Father is our traveling companion.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Do you ever walk for exercise? If so, do you ever walk with a friend? What is the value in doing so?
- What do we mean by the phrases “going with the flow” and “swimming against the tide”? How do you decide whether to conform to or to oppose common practices?

Read Genesis 5:21-24

1. Look at Enoch’s life in its larger context. Compare the last statements of Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20 to Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5, 6. What is the result of a faithful walk with God?
2. Enoch lived in a world dominated by death and corruption (Genesis 6:5), but God allowed him to escape from it. When has walking faithfully with God allowed you to escape the consequences of the sinful lifestyles of others around you?

Read Genesis 6:8-17

3. How were Enoch and Noah alike (Genesis 5:22; 6:9)? While Enoch was taken out of a world of death, what was the result of Noah’s faithful walk with God (vv. 17, 18)?
4. Enoch escaped from the storm, while Noah survived through the storm. When has walking faithfully with God allowed you to survive storms of life? What is your “ark”? See 1 Peter 3:20b-22.

Read Genesis 6:18–7:1; 9:1

5. Noah’s faithful walk did more than simply save himself. Who else benefited from Noah’s faithful walk (6:18-20; 7:1; 9:1)?
6. Our broken world is subject to decay, disaster, and destruction (Romans 8:18-22). How have faithful believers throughout history helped rebuild and renew this world after adversity struck?
7. This week, meditate on the words of Micah 6:8. What can you do to “walk humbly with your God” in this troubled world?

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Be confident that the Lord hears your prayer of faith.**

STUDY: Genesis, Part 1

THEME: Faith That Pleases God

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 24:7-9, 40

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 24; Psalm 66:20; James 5:15, 16

GOD IS PLEASED WITH A PRAYER OF FAITH (ELEAZAR)

BY MARK SCOTT

Prayer is hard to understand. It only works because a merciful God wills it to work. How can God be sovereign and yet open to our suggestions? But God invites (commands?) his people to pray. He is hurt by our distance and preoccupation with other things. He wants us to ask things of him. Few things build God's people up more than seeing their prayers of faith answered with specificity.

Genesis 24 is a huge chapter. At first pass one wonders why 67 verses are devoted to a story about a servant getting a wife for a patriarch's son. This story is rather unique in Genesis. There is no specific word from God, no prophecy, and no real miracle (though there is a stunning answer to prayer) here. But getting a wife for Isaac was more important than one would originally think. If Isaac had no wife, then the promise of God to save the world through Abraham's seed would be compromised.

Get a Wife

Genesis 24:7-9, 40

Sarah had died, and Abraham made arrangements for her burial (Genesis 23). Their son Isaac needed a wife, so Abraham's oldest servant named Eleazar (15:2; 24:2) would serve as the matchmaker. Abraham strongly insisted that Eleazar not take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites (24:1-8). Abraham commissioned Eleazar to get a wife for Isaac from his native land.

Abraham's testimony is that God's providence was at work in this situation. The same God who knew his pedigree, brought him from his place, and made him a promise would send his angel to ensure that the mission would be accomplished (mentioned again in verse 40). To take a little pressure off of Eleazar, Abraham gave him an out in case the potential bride refused to come. The deal was sealed with the custom of placing his hand under the *thigh* (loin or side) of Abraham—a vulnerable place to be sure—and an oath to bind the matter.

Make Me Successful

Genesis 24:10-14

Eleazar took gifts and provisions and set out on his journey. While the gifts were not a dowry for Rebekah, they ensured a favorable response from Laban's household. In reverse Eleazar retraced Abraham's steps from years earlier. He made his way to northwest Mesopotamia (Aram Naharaim) to the town of Nahor. He arrived at eventide, or sunset, when the water would be drawn from the wells by the women.

We could assume that Eleazar had learned well from Abraham his prayer lessons (see Luke 11:1-4). The prayer is respectful, specific, and earnest. After the direct address, Eleazar prayed for success (literally "cause me to meet my appointment"). Eleazar leaned into the *kindness* (*chesed*)—mentioned twice in our text—of God. Then with a degree of specificity that has few parallels in the Bible, Eleazar prayed that the match would be made at the well, that the very young woman of choice would be the "woman at the well," and that she would volunteer to give Eleazar a drink and freely offer to draw water for the 10 camels too (not a small thing).

Give Me a Drink

Genesis 24:15-19

Before Eleazar could get to the "amen" of his prayer, Rebekah showed up with a jar. We learn four things about her: 1) Her family heritage (daughter of Bethuel—thus a member of Abraham's family); 2) Her beauty (good, excellent, attractive); 3) Her marital status (of marital age but still not "having known a man"); 4) Her industriousness (she quickly went to work by filling her jar with water from the spring).

Eleazar watched as his prayer was answered before his eyes. He hurried to meet her and requested a drink of water. (It is hard not to notice some parallels with John 4:4-42.) Rebekah complied with the request. Then, as if she had overheard the specific wording of his prayer, drew water for his 10 camels too. No wonder the next verse (outside of our printed text) notes, "The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not."

God had indeed answered Eleazar's prayer of faith. The potential for failure was high. Eleazar could have failed, the answered prayer could have been missed (though it is difficult to see how), Rebekah's brother Laban could have refused to let her go, or Rebekah could have been unwilling. But the prayer of a righteous person has great power (James 5:16). The journey met with success, a marital match had been realized (Genesis 24:62-67), and God's plan to save the world through Abraham's seed remained on task.

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FOR YOUR CAMELS TOO

BY DAVID FAUST

Excellent customer service seems rare today. Businesses that offer prompt, friendly, and efficient customer care stand out in a culture where sloppy service has become commonplace.

I opened a new bank account recently, and the manager promised to send a debit card and checks in the mail within seven to 10 business days. Five weeks went by. No card, no checks—just a service charge deducted from my account. When I phoned the bank, an automated answering system offered an array of alternatives, but none of the options included talking with a human who could fix the problem. Finally, I drove to the bank and explained the situation to the manager, who merely shrugged her shoulders and muttered, “Yeah, that happens sometimes.” No apology. No explanation. No “Thanks for your patience” or “We appreciate your business.” Apparently, the manager was having a bad day, but she made me feel like a nuisance—and wish I had chosen a different bank.

Her attitude contrasted sharply with the kind stranger I encountered a few days later while changing a flat tire alongside a busy highway. A fellow who happened to be a mechanic stopped to assist. He quickly helped me change the tire. As he prepared to drive away, I mentioned paying him, but he said, “Don’t give me money. That would ruin the blessing!”

Those two encounters stirred some self-examination. Do I serve others with a cheerful spirit, or do I treat people like an inconvenience?

More Than the Minimum

Eleazar faced a tough assignment. His boss, Abraham, instructed him to travel to a distant land and find a wife for the boss’s son, Isaac. How could Eleazar find the right woman? And why would she marry a man she had never met? While Eleazar rested his camels by a well,

he prayed earnestly for God’s guidance and decided he would recognize God’s answer if a woman not only offered him water to drink, but added, “I’ll water your camels too.” (A thirsty camel can drink an enormous amount of water.) Prayers don’t always receive immediate answers, but before Eleazar finished praying, Rebekah stepped forward, gave him a drink, and said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too.” God deserves praise for answering Eleazar’s prayer, and Rebekah stands out because of her willingness to go the extra mile.

Followers of Christ shouldn’t be satisfied with doing the bare minimum. Love those who love you? That’s easy, but Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” Lash out at those who mistreat you? That’s an understandable human reaction, but Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Will offering exceptional customer service impress your boss? Perhaps, but more importantly, Scripture says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23).

God’s grace motivates us to go the extra mile and surpass normal expectations. On the job and in the neighborhood, that kind of attitude will “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10). The church thrives when we give extra-mile service to first-time guests and long-time members. The light of Christ shines through small courtesies like friendly smiles, warm welcomes, prompt replies, sincere apologies, and gracious responses to requests and complaints.

Like Rebekah, let’s water the camels too.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What are some items on your home or work to-do list? How will you determine which items have priority? How will you approach those tasks?
- What is one of the most difficult tasks at home or work you have ever undertaken? What motivated you to keep going when you felt like giving up?

Read Genesis 24:7-9, 40

1. Apparently, the servant in this passage is the same servant mentioned in Genesis 15:2-4. How did the prospects for this man change after Isaac was born? Why might that have made this assignment difficult to undertake?
2. Notice that Abraham spelled out the servant's assignment in some detail. Describe some of the conditions included in this mission. Why were each of these conditions important?
3. In this chapter (and in much of the Bible), godly people are portrayed as taking oaths. Yet in Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus seemed to speak against the practice. How might most oaths in Scripture—including the ones mentioned in this account—differ from those that Jesus forbade? How did this oath motivate the servant to do something he might otherwise have resented doing?

Read Genesis 24:10-14

4. Do you think that the servant's prayer in these verses should be a model for our prayers? Explain. Have you ever offered what you now consider to be an immature prayer, yet God honored it just the same? Tell about that time.
5. Read Psalm 66:20; John 15:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:15, 16. What have you learned about our role and God's role in prayer?

Read Genesis 24:15-19

6. Keeping a promise and seeking God in prayer were instrumental in the servant's fulfilling of his mission. Notice that the servant's exercising of his own judgment based on his observations also played a role. Rebekah was not the only one of "the daughters of the townspeople" at the well (v. 13). What other criteria may have been reasons for the servant approaching her? See also verses 20-27.
7. Bring to mind a difficult task you will probably be undertaking in the near future. How will maintaining your personal integrity, counting on God's guidance, and using your own judgment each play a role in that venture?

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Faithfully obey the Lord
and experience his rich
blessings.**

STUDY: Genesis, Part 1

THEME: Faith That Pleases God

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 12:1-7; 22:15-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 11:8-10; John 14:23

GOD IS PLEASED WITH FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE (ABRAHAM)

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith in God is like a muscle in the body. It has to be stretched to be strong. Each of the Old Testament people we have studied this month had their faith stretched. Abel stretched his faith with his sacrifice. Enoch and Noah stretched their faith in their daily walk. Eleazar stretched his faith in his specific prayer. But the man looked to most in the Old Testament for having his faith stretched was Abraham. No wonder the New Testament commends this man (Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:9).

When He Was Called

Genesis 12:1-7

Hebrews 11:8-10 helps us label this section of our text. Abraham's initial stretching of his faith took place when God called him. He had been living in Ur of the Chaldeans. God moved him to Haran of Mesopotamia and then called him to go to the land of Israel. This text is the great commission of the Old Testament. While there are hints in Genesis 3-11 of God's efforts to save the world through Jesus, the real plan to do so begins in Genesis 12:1. This plan to save the world would emerge from one man and his family.

This "exalted father" (the meaning of Abram), was told by God to "Go," and there is something refreshing about reading, "So Abram went." That is what faithful obedience does. This calling was to be complete. In an effort to work through one man and his family, Abram's leaving included *country* (land or earth), *people* (kindred or relatives), and *household* (family or descendants). God would lead him to the land, so Abram went out not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).

This calling was embedded in a promise of blessing. Some form of the word *bless* (the very powerful Hebrew word *barak*) appears five times here. This blessing would extend to Abram in a four-fold way: 1) Great nation (numerous, see Exodus 1:7); 2) Great name (in contrast to those who tried to make their own name great, Genesis 11:4); 3) Great protection (blessing those who bless and cursing those who curse); 4) Great influence (the families of the earth would be blessed).

This calling also involved his family. Abram left most of his extended family behind. But he took his wife Sarai (princess), his nephew Lot (from whom Abram was separated in Genesis 13), his *people* (souls), and his *possessions* (goods or property). These all went to the land of Canaan (lowlanders).

This calling also involved going to a new land of trees and rocks. Dr. Matthew Sleeth has suggested that every significant character in the Bible was associated with a tree (*24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier Happier Life*). They came to the great tree of Moreh at Shechem—unknown to us but not the patriarchs. It might have been an old Canaanite place of worship (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*). But Abram would sanctify the place with a little pile of rocks—an altar where he would worship Yahweh who had called him.

When He Was Tested

Genesis 22:15-19

Hebrews 11:17-19 helps us label this section of our text. Several events have taken place in Abram's life since his initial calling. He fled to Egypt to feed his family. He separated from Lot and then had to rescue him. The covenant was formally established with him and sealed with circumcision. His name was changed. He fathered Ishmael through Hagar. He entertained angels. He interceded for Sodom but saw it destroyed. He lied about Sarah and a pagan king rebuked him. Finally, his son of promise was born.

But with this son of promise came a terrible test. We know it is a test because the narrator tells us that (Genesis 22:1). God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. Faith is stretched in initial calls but also in the tests of life that come our way. This "third day story" found Abraham seconds away from sacrificing his promised son on Mount Moriah. But by the grace of God the sacrifice was averted. Abraham had passed the test.

The angel of the Lord, who sounds very much like the Lord himself, reaffirmed the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. Blessings, numerous descendants, victory over enemies, and all nations are all part of the reaffirmation of the promise to this man of faith. Once back from Mount Moriah, Abraham journeyed south to Beersheba where he stayed for some time. The blessings of God are best experienced through the door labeled "obedience."

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JUST GO

BY DAVID FAUST

My youngest granddaughter hasn't reached her second birthday yet, but she's quick on her feet, zooming around so fast I can barely keep up with her. And she keeps adding new words to her vocabulary. I brag that she's bilingual because she says *agua*, the Spanish word for water. She's fond of short words. One of her favorites is "no," which she says clearly in both English and Spanish.

Two-letter words can communicate a lot. "Oh" expresses surprise or delight. "Is" defines reality. "If" lays down conditions. "At" or "in" specify our location. "Do" denotes action. "Up" lifts our vision. "My" shows possession, and two-letter words like "me," "be," "am," "we," and "us" identify who we are.

Here's a two-letter word that has life-changing power, especially when it comes from the lips of the Lord himself: "Go!"

God challenged Abram's faith by telling him, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). How would you react if God gave you those same instructions? Leave your country? Why leave the blessings you enjoy at home? Leave your people? Why would you say goodbye to your family and friends and move away from things that are familiar and safe?

There's a close relationship, though, between "going" and "growing." If water stands still in cold weather, it freezes. It's the same with our spiritual lives. We usually don't grow by standing still. We have to keep moving. Someone has said, "To step toward your destiny, you might have to step away from your security." To go somewhere else, you have to leave where you are, and that often requires leaving behind things that are comfortable, predictable, and easy. If you feel restless inside, it may be a sign that you need to grow and tackle a new adventure.

Where Is the Lord Asking You to Go?

Jesus often instructed his disciples to "go."

Go and be reconciled. According to Jesus, if you need to make peace with others, before you offer your gift at the altar, "First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24).

Go the extra mile. "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles" (v. 41). Do the extra thing, go the extra distance, do what stretches your faith and demonstrates God's grace.

Go and tell your story. After Jesus healed a man who had been afflicted by demons, the grateful fellow begged to travel with Jesus. But the Lord told him, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

Go and serve. Remember how Jesus concluded his story about the Good Samaritan? "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). As he did with Abram, God might be asking you to leave your homeland and serve him in a faraway place, or maybe he's simply prompting you to go somewhere close by. Is there a sick friend you need to visit? Has the Holy Spirit been nudging you to knock on your neighbor's door and make a new friend? Is God calling you to exchange security for sacrifice? Don't play it safe. Put the two-letter word into action. Just go.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Think back on your school days. How good were you at taking tests? How would you prepare for a test?
- As an adult, what are some specific ways you feel you have been tested? What events in your life have tested your courage, your abilities, or your trust in others?

Read Genesis 12:1, 4-6

1. God tested Abram's faith by telling him to "go." What three things was he told to leave behind (v. 1)? Look at these and think why it would be difficult to leave each one.
2. Leaving the familiar is difficult enough. But what other challenges would have made Abram's trip a tough move (vv. 4-6; Hebrews 11:8, 9)?

Read Genesis 12:2, 3, 7

3. Put the definition of faith given in Hebrews 11:1 into your own words. Try not to use any words longer than six letters in your paraphrase!
4. List the unrealized blessings in these verses that Abram trusted God to fulfill. (See also Hebrews 11:10.) How did this type of faith allow Abram to weather the challenges he and his family faced?

Read Genesis 22:15-19

5. Notice the mention of "only son" in Genesis 22:2 and 22:16. Why do you think that the first mention of love in the Bible in the context of an "only son" is significant? Refer to 1 John 4:9, 10 to explain.
6. How would you feel if you received something for which you prayed many years, only to have it taken away? Read the commentary on Abraham's testing found in Hebrews 11:17-19. How does it explain how Abraham's past experiences with God allowed him to survive this test?
7. Romans 4:16 tells us that Abraham is the father of all who share his type of obedient faith. Give yourself a quick "spiritual paternity test." On a scale of one to 10 rate yourself on these faith traits: willingness to leave my comfort zone, trust that God will fulfill his promises to me, ability to sacrifice that which is nearest to me if called to do so.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.