*The Big Picture*

*God’s Call and Promise to Abraham*

*Genesis 15:1-6, 22:1-18*

**Icebreaker**

Go around the circle, everyone say your name, where you are from, and what you are studying. And answer this question: What was something in your life that was challenging to do but rewarding in the end?

**Introduction**

Tonight we are going to read a story from the Bible together. As Christians, we study the Bible because we believe that it is God’s word to us. We believe that humans wrote the different books of the Bible, but they did that with God’s help and guidance. God gave us the Bible so that we could use it to learn who he is and understand His plans. So the Bible is full of lots of different stories and teachings, but they all help tell a bigger story about God and about the world we live in, and how He is going to restore the brokenness we see through Jesus. It is the story of God and the story of us!

This semester, we are looking at the big picture story we see in the Bible, starting from the very beginning. We won’t cover the whole Bible (because we won’t have time for that!) but we will look at some important passages to help understand the story of God. And we will see how the entire story leads up to Jesus. So because we believe that God wants to help us understand His story, we are going to pray and then we will get started!

**Pray**

**Intro to the Passage**

Last week we talked about how God created the world, but when humans decided to disobey Him, they messed everything up. Because they didn’t trust Him, their relationship with God and with each other was damaged, and brokenness entered our world. But, God wasn’t content to just let the world stay broken…He loved the world and had a plan to fix things. Tonight, we will look at how that plan started.

After Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, about 2,000 years passed until a man named Abraham was born (If you want to know what happened during those 2,000 years, read Genesis chapters 4-11). God had a special role for Abraham in his plan to fix the world, and this is how his role in the story begins: “Now the Lord said to Abraham, “Go from your country and your people and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that *you will be a blessing.* I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you *all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him.” (Genesis 12:1-4) So God called Abraham to leave his home for a new place and told him that he would be the father of a great nation. And that nation would bless the rest of the world, showing everyone who God was and what it was like to be in a relationship with Him. The passage we will start with tonight takes place about 10 years after God first made that promise to Abraham.

*Have everyone read the passage silently to themselves, and write down questions they have as they read. Then, read the passage out loud, each person reading one verse.*

**Now we are going to look at questions to help us understand this passage.**

**1. Who are the people/characters in this passage?** The Lord, Abraham, Isaac, servants (they also might mention Eliezer, the Angel of the Lord, and Abraham’s future offspring.)

**2. In the beginning of the passage, the Lord spoke to Abraham and told him that He will be his shield and that his reward will be very great. How did Abraham respond?** He says, “I’m childless and have to pass my possessions on to one of my servants instead of a son…what can you give me that will make my situation better??”

**3. How do you think Abraham felt?** Frustrated, discouraged, a little hopeless. He still respects God and his power though (he calls Him “Sovereign Lord”). **Why do you think he felt that way?** Abraham left his family and friends behind to obey God. When he did that, he wasn’t just leaving behind people he cared about…he was leaving behind security and comfort. And he took that risk because God promised to make him the father of a great nation. Now, *10 years later*, he still had no children and was getting too old to have any. How can you be the father of a great nation if you don’t even have any children?!

**4. How did God respond to Abraham’s frustration?** He responded with patience and a reaffirmation of His original promise. He told Abraham that he *will* have a son, and even that he will have more descendants than the stars in the sky. It was a very generous promise to someone who was feeling pretty hopeful.

**5. How did Abraham respond to the Lord?** It says he believed the Lord, and that the Lord counted him righteous because of it. In other words, because Abraham had faith in God, he was in good standing with Him. **How would you have responded if you were in Abraham’s situation?**

**6. Over 15 years later, Isaac was born, and then 12 years after that, what did God tell Abraham to do?** He told him to take his only son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

**7. How do you think Abraham felt when God asked him to do this? Why?** He was probably devastated…he had given up everything to obey God and patiently waited for almost 25 years before he finally had a son. Isaac was the only means to which God could fulfill his promise to Abraham to make him the father of a great nation. Now, God was apparently going to take him away. And of course, he was probably upset because he was Isaac’s father and loved him.

**8. So what did Abraham do?** He obeyed! **Why do you think Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac?** We don’t know what exactly went through Abraham’s head. But, the Lord had promised to make him the father of a great nation many times, and had also provided in other ways such as keeping him safe from danger and giving him favor with kings of other land. So, maybe He trusted that somehow it would turn out ok. Maybe he thought God would provide another son. In another part of the Bible, it says that Abraham believed that God could even raise Isaac from the dead if necessary. Whatever the motivation, we see that Abraham was willing to give up his own son in order to obey the Lord.

**9. What happened when Abraham was ready to kill Isaac?** The Angel of the Lord said, “STOP! Don’t hurt the boy…now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld your son.” In a sense, He was saying, “You have passed the test.”

**10. So why do you think God told Abraham to sacrifice his son in the first place?** He wanted to test him. When God first told Abraham to leave his family behind, he was asking him to give up his past. And when he told him to sacrifice Isaac, he was asking him to give up his future. God wanted to see if Abraham fully trusted Him enough to obey even when it didn’t make sense.

**11. What do you think the main point of this story is? (Or, what do you think this story is supposed to teach us about God?)** One possible idea: God is always faithful and can be trusted, even when we don’t understand what He is doing. He made a promise to Abraham, and he kept it. (V. 14…The Lord Will Provide) Abraham probably questioned whether or not God would follow through his promise because he waited 25 years for Isaac to be born. And when God told him to kill Isaac, he probably doubted God and questioned whether or not He should follow through. He might have thought it would be better to ignore God. But God wants us to **SURRENDER** our lives to Him, so that He can provide for us and keep his promises. Since Adam and Eve, people doubted God and tried to live a part from Him, but his desire is for us to surrender to Him and obey, so that He can give us all the good things he promises. (And remember, if Abraham hadn’t surrendered to God, he would never had had a son in the first place, because it was a miracle!)

**12. According to what we’ve read so far, why do you think obedience to God is important?** God is always good and always provides for us…he has the best intentions for us. When we chose to do things our way, the world was broken and ruined. But when we choose to obey God, we are acknowledging that His way is best…we are choosing something better than we can offer.

*This would be an excellent place to share a testimony about a time God called you to do something uncomfortable or hard that led to something great you wouldn’t have experienced otherwise. Hit on His faithfulness to fulfill His promises!*

**14. How was Abraham different from Adam?**

**13. At the end of the passage, God tells Abraham that because he obeyed, He will surely bless Him and his descendants. What does verse 18 say?** “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” **What do you think that means?** It basically means that God wanted to form a people group, a nation, that would bless the rest of the world. This nation would show the rest of the world who God was and what it was like to follow Him and obey Him. They would show people that His way was better than the one we come up with. SO, the world was broken and messed up, but God wanted to do something through these people to help fix it. This was the beginning of God’s plan to renew the broken world!

**15. Any other questions?**

**Conclusion**

So, as you can see, Abraham was a man that had a lot of faith in God. He had plenty of reasons to doubt Him and to turn away, but he never did. He was far from perfect, but He trusted God so much that He was willing to give up everything (including his own son) for Him. And because of his faith, God blessed Abraham and made him the father of an entire nation. And through that nation, God was going to bless the earth and bring about restoration. Abraham’s story reminds us that God is the one who promises and that He will provide. We all face the same decision as Abraham: Do we try and control everything and do things the way we think are best, or do we surrender our lives to a God who promises because we trust that He can provide for all our needs? What would it look like for you to obey God like Abraham did? Think about these questions this week! Next week, we will continue on with the story and read about what happened to Abraham’s descendants!

**Prayer**