

SENT Church 2015

GENESIS

chapters twelve to fifty



Introduction

SENT. It's a word you've heard a lot in the past year if you've been around our church. It's a little word in length, but packed with meaning. To the person seeking to follow Jesus, it means seeing ourselves as ambassadors to the world, our world, around us (2 Corinthians 5:20) in word and deed.

This study is designed to understand the story of some regular, goofy, sinful, unremarkable people who grasped the love of God and saw themselves as SENT. In doing so, our hope is that you may not only become more knowledgeable about God's Word, but that you may become aware of God's crazy love for you—a love that sends us out to share and proclaim that love everywhere we are, to everyone we meet.

Some of you may be asking, "Why Genesis? Why an Old Testament book?" Genesis is a book about God, first and foremost. Though we read about many people who said and did many things (both ordinary and extraordinary), the main focus of Genesis is not on them at all. It's on Yahweh, the Creator, the Redeemer. In the opening two chapters, we are presented with a marvelous story of the beginning of the world, of humanity, which stands in stark contrast to the surrounding cultures' understanding of who we are and how we got here. In those societies, the gods are angry and humans came into being as cosmic accidents, results of the gods battling each other (see the Babylonian creation myth, "Enuma Elish"). Genesis, on the other hand, begins by saying we are here because a loving, personal and caring God wanted us here and has a purpose for us.

This beautiful picture quickly gets disrupted as the fruit gets eaten in Genesis 3. Humanity decides its own desires are more important than Yahweh's, and a great chasm opens, separating humanity from its Creator. Genesis 4 to 11 then want to demonstrate how broken we become without a relationship with Yahweh. But as stated earlier, that's not really all Genesis is about. Sin and brokenness are present throughout this story, but God is more present. The real story of Genesis is of a God who goes to extreme lengths to bring His people back from their depravity. And it's a story of that same God giving hopeless and meaningless humans a plan, a purpose and a mission, as well as a new identity. This is why we chose to study this book: it speaks today.

As you read, study, discuss these ancient words, may you be blessed (you'll discover the importance of this word shortly). May you be challenged. May you be encouraged. May you walk away, not simply being a hearer of God's Word, but a doer (James 1:22). May you see yourself as SENT.

WEEK I:

Sent to Bless The World

What do you remember about this book? What is it trying to tell us?

AUTHORSHIP & NAME

The book of Genesis has been traditionally accredited to the authorship of Moses as part of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament). Moses, as he was leading his people out of slavery and into the Promised Land, thought it appropriate to remind people of their beginning, their ancestors and more importantly, who this God is whom they are now following to freedom. "Genesis" is the Greek title of the book, which comes from the original Hebrew title, *Berishith*, which means "In the beginning" (the opening words of the book). Genesis was most likely passed down verbally for generations until it was likely compiled and edited during the period of the Exile. Genesis would have relevance to not only the exodus generation, but to the exiles in Babylon who would be asking themselves, "How did we get here? Where is God in all of this? How do we get out of this mess?" These questions, we would argue, are just as valid today.

Read Genesis II:26-32

We love genealogies, don't we? These are (unfortunately) parts of the Bible you and I skip over—because there are lots of names and places and numbers that don't seem to have much meaning or relevance to us today. But genealogies are vitally important in the flow of the text:

THOSE BORING GENEALOGIES

So far, the story in Genesis up until this point can be summarized as such: Paradise, Fall, Humanity Spiraling out of control. Even in the glimpses of hope (such as Noah's faithfulness), there is not much to feel good about. The beginning of Genesis II (the Tower of Babel) is a story of humans at their absolute worst—blatantly trying to exalt themselves to the status of gods. It's not a great story so far..

And this brings us to yet another genealogy. Genealogies are family (and cultural) records that demonstrate two things in Genesis: first, how all these different people/cultures relate to one another (this becomes important later on) and second, how God's plan is still at work despite human sinfulness. In Genesis I:28, the very first command God ever gives is to be fruitful and multiply. This is God's plan—not only how the earth will be populated, but be blessed. So as we read genealogies, we are reading how people are (whether they know it or not) playing a part of God's rescue plan.

But what's the problem we encounter in this genealogy (hint: see verse 30)? How is this problem (seemingly) putting a halt to God's bigger plan?

Read Genesis 12:1-5.

What important shift in the plot is happening here? Abram not only is unable to have children through his barren wife, Sarai, but God calls him to leave the rest of his family behind. God is essentially saying, "I know you can't have kids AND I want you to leave the rest of your family...in order that you may have a bigger family."

How would you respond if God said this to you? What logical sense does this make—to forsake what you have for a promise of what you don't have?

God is doing here something that Jesus promises us. Have a read of Matthew 19:28-30.

How do these two passages (from Genesis 12 and Matthew 19) relate?

God does not ask Abram to give up anything He is not going to replace with something better. He tells Abram to leave his land and promises a new land. He is telling him to leave his family, but God will provide a new family (more on this later). He tells him to forsake his father's household, which essentially means his stability and future inheritance, but God will "bless" Him.

BLESSING

There is not one easy way to understand the biblical term "blessing". In the Greek language (in the New Testament), to be "blessed" means to be made happy, joy-filled. Often misunderstood in the Old Testament as meaning material wealth and abundance, a "blessing" simply means to be under God's grace, provision and care. That simply means God will fully provide more than you can ask or imagine. But this happiness, this blessedness is NOT found in lots of children or lots of wealth or good health, but in God alone as the source of one's joy. So whether you have a lot or a little, whether you're sick or healthy, whether you're having a great time or find yourself in dire straits, you know you're okay because God is with you and that's really all you need.

WEEK 1:

Sent to Bless The World *(continued)*

As wonderful as this promise sounds, did you notice something strange? Have a look at the end of verse 1—God never actually tells him exactly what Abram is supposed to do other than to “go”—but even then, God provides no direction in which way to go.

What do you make of this?

Many of us today won't often start into a ministry, have a spiritual conversation, be more generous, do something radical for Jesus UNLESS we have clear direction, guidelines and planning.

How does Abram respond (see verse 4)?

Why didn't he question God's promise?

What keeps YOU from being SENT? From trusting God? From doing something crazy for Jesus?

Abram was sent to be a blessing to this world. How are you being a blessing to this world? What might God be telling you to do right now? Based on this passage, what might be an appropriate response?

Read Genesis 12:10-13:4.

What is happening here?

Abram leaves everything behind for the promise of a new life in a new land, but what do we read about this new land in verse 10? How would you respond in this situation if you were Abram?

Here is where the plot thickens, so to speak. So far in Genesis, whenever God shows up, things change for a while, only for humans to mess it all up again. Humans constantly sin and despite God's intervention up to this point in the story, sin seems to be prevailing. God shows up in Genesis 12 and we quickly encounter three problems: Abram and Sarai's inability to produce children (thus stopping

the story in its tracks), the “promised land” being infertile and now Abram’s fearfulness, apparent lack of trust in God and deceit to Pharaoh to preserve his own life. The question becomes—Will sin and brokenness prevail again?

What results from this episode? Does sin and brokenness win? Is God’s promise rendered void because of infertility and human frailty?

How does this relate to you? When life doesn’t work out the way it’s “meant” to? When you sin? Does God give up on you? What does Abram do despite his failure (see 13:4)?

Who is the main character in this narrative?

Who is the main character in YOUR narrative?

How can you live TODAY under a God who never fails you, never gives up on you, who never quits?
How will you respond to THAT type of God?

WEEK 2:

Sent With Promise

In the ancient world, there was no such thing as an atheist. Everyone believed in the gods as the powers behind various aspects of life—rain, harvest, love, family, war, sun, wind, water, etc. These gods, however, were not only uninterested in human affairs, but dependent on humans to satiate their unending desires. People often lived in fear never knowing if one was “in the right” with the gods or not, and so they constantly sacrificed and made offerings to the gods of their culture they felt they most needed to appease.

Read Genesis 15:1-6

How is this picture of Yahweh different than the other gods of Abram’s time?

How would you have reacted if you were Abram, at 75+ years of age, hearing that God was going to provide you with your own biological children?

How does this promise stand against Abram’s reality that we read about in Genesis 11:30? What is God saying about Himself here in spite of the obvious evidence that Abram was old and his wife infertile?

What does it mean to you that God likes defying the ideas we often think impossible? Can you name some other instances in the Bible where God does this? Can you name some examples from your OWN life where God seemed to be working against what reality says should happen?

Read verse 6 carefully. Why didn’t Abram question God and God’s ridiculous promise?

The word translated “believe” in this verse simply means to have complete trust. To have utter dependence. When was the last time you believed God to such a degree? What was that like? If you haven’t done so, what prevents you from believing God like Abram?

WEEK 2:

Sent With Promise *(continued)*

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Verse 6 also reminds us that Abram's trust in God resulted in God "crediting" Abram with "righteousness." The word "crediting" means to put something in someone's account that they did not have before. The word "righteousness" is a bit trickier. Because many of us have read Paul's letters in the New Testament, we quickly jump to equating righteousness to salvation. Though those terms are inherently related, righteousness does not necessarily relate to one's eternity (as "salvation" often does). In the Hebrew language, the word "righteous" is a legal term—a verdict that is granted by a judge after reviewing the case, hearing the witnesses and examining the evidence. If the person on trial acted appropriately given the situation, the judge deemed that person as "righteous"—having a right standing before the court. So when God credits Abram with righteousness, it means Abram, is "in the right" before God, that he responded appropriately to God's promise—which always results then in God's blessing.

Do you think when God weighs up the evidence of your life, hears witness testimony on how you lived—He will say that you are "in the right" before Him? Why or why not?

Is your ultimate goal in life to find yourself "right" in God's eyes like Abram? Or is righteousness something you just assume you have and therefore make other goals your priority?

Read Genesis 15:7-21.

Here in one person do we find someone whom at one minute, completely grasps God and responds appropriately with great trust and faith in him, but the very next minute makes a complete fool of himself. After totally believing God would allow two old people beyond child-birthing years to have a baby, Abram questions God on how exactly God is going to come through with the promise of land.

Why do you think Abram is like this?

Do you ever feel like this? Having deep faith at times, and having no faith at others? Why do you think we behave this way?

How does God respond to Abram's absurdity here? Does He get angry? Is He surprised?

As we have examined in past studies, God cements His promises to Abram through a ceremony, a pact called a covenant. A covenant was a divine pledge of faithfulness between two parties to honour and love one another (like between a husband and wife) that was unbreakable. To seal this covenant, the parties would sacrifice animals by cutting them in half and laying each half of the animal down side by side. The parties would then walk through these carcasses together as a way of saying "If I break my part of the covenant, may what happened to these animals happen to me."

Now who in fact "walks" through the carcasses in this story? What is God saying about Himself here? Have you ever seen God not be faithful to His promises?

But what about Abram?

Read Genesis 16:1-6.

How does Abram respond to this covenant?

How is Abram believing God in Genesis 15:6 a departure from his actions in Genesis 16:1-6?

Why do you think he responded this way?

Do YOU ever respond this way when God doesn't show up right away?

But again, how does God respond to Abram's behaviour?

Skim through Genesis 17.

Notice God tells Abram that he also has a part to play in this relationship: circumcision. Circumcision was an outward sign that you were different, unlike everyone around you. God here was telling Abram that in order to be in a relationship with Him, Abram couldn't just continue to sit around and do dumb stuff—he needed to respond not just with head belief (ch. 15) but with belief demonstrated by action.

WEEK 2:

Sent With Promise (*continued*)

Like Abram, God has made many promises to you. What are some of those promises?

How have you responded with belief (in your brain and heart) and action? Do you have belief but no action? Or action but no real belief? How can we get this equation right?

What God-promise do you need to cling to right now? How can you faithfully respond to that promise this week?

WEEK 3:

Sent to Righteous Living

God's wrath. This phrase is not one we often like to think about; it's one that turns many off to Christianity as a whole. What do we do with it? Is wrath something we just have to accept? Or is it something we should think about and wrestle with? This is what our passage this week has us deliberating.

Read Genesis 18:16-33.

What is happening in this passage?

GOD'S CONVERSATIONS (WITH HIMSELF)

Throughout the book of Genesis, there are moments when the reader gets to hear the inside scoop on what God is thinking (that the characters in the story do not know about). Many of these times when God speaks, He seemingly does not know what is happening or how events will play out. But the author of Genesis elsewhere makes it very clear God does know exactly what is going on and is always in control. So what is the purpose of these divine conversations?

Verses 17-19 are God's dialogue (either with Himself or with the men/angels who are with Abraham) about whether God should disclose His plans to Abraham or not. As we read, God does just that—what then ensues tells us that Abraham is not just a man whom God makes promises to, but one whom he deeply loves, so much so He reveals to Abraham His divine counsel. This is the purpose of these moments—to demonstrate God's love and care for the world (unlike the other ancient gods who could care less about what is going on). That as we are disclosed the mind of God, we are to be reminded of His emotion, His heartache over sin, His desire for intimacy with His people. These "feelings" do not negate God's sovereignty, but simply shows us God's heart that goes along with His power.

How many times does Abraham negotiate with God over (supposedly) Sodom's rescue? What does this dialogue say about Abraham? What does it say about God?

What do you do with passages like this and others where the characters are trying to "test" God (think also of Gideon and the fleece or Moses and the unfaithful Israelites)? How do you weigh this against passages like Luke 4, where Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself off the top of the Temple, because the angels will catch him—and Jesus tells him that we are to not put God to the test?

Can we approach God, negotiate with God, bargain with God or not? Why do you think God listens to Abraham when he does this?

Read Genesis 19:1-38

LOT AND SODOM

Lot, we discover earlier in Genesis, is Abraham's nephew who left Mesopotamia with Abraham in Genesis 12. Lot eventually became so successful as a herdsman, he had to separate from Abraham so each of them could have their own grazing land (Genesis 13). Lot then lives in Sodom (just south of the Dead Sea) in Canaan. In Genesis 14, a battle between several neighbouring kings took place and the king of Sodom's army was defeated, his goods, people and food taken. Lot was also one of the prisoners. Abraham was notified and raised his own army and defeated the conquerors, and rescued Lot as well as all that was taken from Sodom. The king of Sodom wants to give Abraham all the plunder from the battle, but Abraham refuses and acknowledges that his wealth and status come from God alone. These details become important in our story of Genesis 19.

What is taking place in the first part of this passage (19:1-29)?

What does the author want us to know about ALL the inhabitants of Sodom (see verse 4)?

What other story in Genesis involves a righteous man and his family being rescued by God before catastrophic disaster overtakes the wicked? How are these two stories similar? How is even the end of the stories similar?

WEEK 3:

Sent to Righteous Living *(continued)*

LOT AS RIGHTEOUS?

We are supposed to view Lot as “one of the righteous” that gets spared by God (which is what Abraham was talking to God about in Genesis 18). His story closely parallels Noah’s (Genesis 6-9). But what do we do with 19:8? Lot, it seems, would rather sacrifice his daughters to the lustful crowd than these strangers he has just met. How is that righteous?

Hospitality was a big deal in the eastern world (and still is today). When there was no TripAdvisor or Orbitz or Lonely Planet, before there were many hotels or vacation rentals or restaurants, travellers were dependent on the kindness of strangers. You would hope to be welcomed into someone’s home as you were on your journey, that they would share their home and food with you, because you had no other place to stay, no other food to eat. This was a sacred thing and whomever you welcomed into your home you were expected to treat with great hospitality and care.

But it wasn’t just random men who came into Lot’s house that day—they were angels, God’s personal representatives. So beyond the normal hospitality customs of the day, Lot was entreating God Himself. Was Lot’s attempt of placating the crowd with his daughters acceptable? Probably not. But he may have thought—“What is more important to me? My own family? Or God?” When we consider that decision, Lot seems a least a slight bit more righteous.

How does the city of Sodom react to Lot’s pleas? What does this say about the people in this city? What’s God’s view of all of this (see 18:20 and 19:13)?

Why do you think God destroyed Sodom? So far in Abraham’s story, God almost overlooks Abraham’s idiotic behaviour. So why is Abraham (and Lot here, who is also a bit clueless) shown grace, while Sodom shown judgment? What marks the difference between them?

Read 19:29 again.

Lot’s rescue was down to God “remembering” Abraham—which means several things. It means that God in fact, honoured his commitment to Abraham in Genesis 18 to spare the city if any righteous people (Lot) were found there—Sodom was destroyed AFTER Lot left.

How might this change our view of God as delighting in wrath and vengeance?

Secondly, it also points back to God's promise to and purpose for Abraham way back in Genesis 12—to be a blessing to all the nations.

We heard Abraham blessed the nation of Sodom by rescuing them and speaking of God to them way back in Genesis 14. Lot, who would now have been known to be related to Abraham begs the people of the city to repent (to change their minds). Despite this knowledge of Abraham and His God who saves, despite Lot's enthusiastic pleas, the people of Sodom refused to relent. In other words, they had many opportunities to wake up to God righteousness but refused.

And yet from this sad story and its scandalous and incestuous ending, how does God (through Abraham) actually bless the nations (hint: who is Moab and Ben-Ammi?)?

What does this story tell us about how we are sent to righteous living?

What kind of things happen when you and I faithfully follow Jesus?

What happens when you continually reject God's love and concern for you?

How can you live righteously THIS WEEK in a world that is often hostile toward Jesus?

WEEK 4:

Sent to Sacrifice

Sacrifice was a normal part of the ancient world. In every culture, people would give offerings to the gods to satiate their appetites, to abate their wrath or to earn their favour. In an document found from ancient Assyria, a man writes a prayer to "all the gods and goddesses" asking and imploring them to forgive him for whatever offense he may have committed (that he is unaware of committing) that may have angered them and resulted in his current hardship. This is how many lived back then (and still do in certain parts of the world today).

The bigger the offense or plea, the bigger the sacrifice required. Archaeological and manuscript evidence demonstrate that most ancient cultures would practice human sacrifice. In fact, this so common that people didn't view it as wrong or unnecessary. It was simply part of life. The gods require blood. The more important the source, the happier the gods will be.

Read Genesis 22:1-2.

So after several repeated promises of a son and God sealing that promise through a covenant, God now decides to take back the promise. The word for "tested" (as in God tested Abraham) is term that means "to stretch to one's limits".

How is God stretching Abraham to his limits in this passage?

How would you feel if God were to say this to you? How would you respond?

Read Genesis 22:3-8.

How long does Abraham wait to do this task?

If you had THREE DAYS to think about what God was asking you to do—what do you think would be going through your mind in that time?

How would you respond if your child asked you what was happening (see verse 7)?

WEEK 4:

Sent to Sacrifice *(continued)*

Read Genesis 22:9-19.

Is there any hesitation in Abraham's actions? Why do you think he decided to go through with it? Is he just a malevolent father?

Read verse 12 again. What do you think the text means when God says, "NOW I know that you fear God?" Did God not know before? What's the point of this test? Whose benefit is it really for?

How is God demonstrating that He is totally UNLIKE all the other gods of the day?

How does this relate to the idea of praying, when God already knows what we need before we even ask (Matthew 6:8) or taking action when God already has determined the result (Esther 4:14)? Why does God allow this test to happen? Why does God desire to "know" how we would respond when He already has foreknowledge of everything already?

Several times God emphasizes that Abraham did not withhold his son, his only son (verses 2, 12, 16). The promise of being a great nation (Genesis 12), having more descendants than stars in the sky (Genesis 15), of being a father to many nations (Genesis 17) all rests on the continuity of his family line through Isaac. So Isaac represents his security, his future, his treasure.

Compare this story to Luke 18:18-30. What's the difference between Abraham and the Rich Ruler?

This passage wants us to answer this question: What is your faith motivated by?

If you were to take a long, hard look at your heart, would you say you believe in God because He is the most important thing to you, or do you believe in Him because of the promise of what He provides?

John Piper, a famous pastor and writer, once asked in his book *God Is The Gospel* this question:

"The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?"

How would YOU answer this question? How did Abraham?

In total honesty, how would you respond right now if God appeared to you and asked you to give up the thing you love most (your children, your job, your wealth, your reputation, even your eternity) in order to choose Him, what would you do?

Why do you think Abraham was willing to sacrifice everything for God? What did he know that we don't?

What are you willing (or better yet, not willing) to sacrifice to follow God?

WEEK 5:

Sent Together

In Genesis 24, the text takes another interesting turn. The promise of land, offspring and future blessing seems in jeopardy. Why? Abraham's son, Isaac, is yet to marry. Over and over again the author of Genesis wants the reader to feel this tension as God's plan of dealing with sin and ushering in redemption to His creation meets with obstacle after obstacle. How will God overcome THIS dilemma?

Read Genesis 24:1-14

UNDER MY THIGH

What's with this weird oath? Here (and in several other places in the Old Testament), the term "thigh" is a euphemism for "genitals" (don't you wish you could read Hebrew?). Back in ancient times, oaths were serious business, thought to be heard by the gods as sincere promises that would make you lose face in society had you revoked. Often, when swearing an oath, one would grab some sort of object considered sacred to the person you were making the oath with (we do this today when people put their hand on a Bible to give testimony in court). So why is Abraham making this poor servant swear on his genitals? (And why isn't this servant repelled by this idea?) Rewinding to Genesis 17, God's covenant with Abraham was sealed through the act of circumcision. And God's promise to Abraham centered around fertility. Thus it would make sense that Abraham's most sacred object was, well...not because it was obscene (otherwise the servant wouldn't do it), but because people realized the importance of the family line, particularly one that had been promised by the God of the universe.

Why do you think Abraham is so insistent on the servant finding a wife from his own people group, rather than a woman from the Canaanites? What do we know about what people are like from Canaan (hint: Sodom and Gomorrah were towns in Canaan)?

What does the servant do in order find the right girl? Do you think his prayer is far-fetched? Why or why not?

Do you ever try this type of prayer with God? Has it ever worked? Is this an example we are meant to follow...after all, it happens a lot throughout the Old Testament?

WEEK 5:

Sent Together *(continued)*

Does this servant have great faith or misguided faith?

Read Genesis 24:15-31.

How does the event play out? Do you think this is coincidence or did God really answer the servant's exact prayer?

It turns out that Rebekah and her family all are followers of Abraham's God, Yahweh. How does this tie back in to Abraham's desire for his son to marry someone from his own culture rather than a Canaanite?

Why is this so important in the church today?

What might Isaac's future looked like had he married a Canaanite rather than a Yahweh worshipper?

How does this relate to what Paul says in I Corinthians 6:14-7:1?

Do you think there is wisdom in this advice for Christians? Why or why not?

Read Genesis 24:58-67.

How is Rebekah here like Abraham in Genesis 12?

Rebekah left her home, her family and her security for an unknown direction that the Lord put on her heart. Why do you think she went along, not knowing what was ahead, not knowing even who Isaac was or what he was like?

Would YOU do something radical like this if God asked you to?

The end of this passage, in the original Hebrew, is very poetic, like the conclusion of a great love story. It is meant to help us understand that when we give up what is most comfortable or what gives us security or purpose in order to pursue the great unknown God directs us to, amazing things, strange things, difficult things, poetic things, happen. Do you think this is true? Have you ever experienced this in your own life?

The other main point to this story is that when God calls you to something, He never calls you to do it in isolation. At the beginning of this passage, Isaac is far away from his family, isolated with no love interest and with his family line (and therefore God's promise) in danger of ceasing. This story isn't merely about God overcoming obstacles to His promises, it's about God providing community, partnership, love and a sense that what He has called us to do, we are to do it together.

In what ways have you become isolated in your faith—walking with God all by yourself?

What ways are you walking with God together in community (with your mates, with your family, with your spouse and kids, etc.)? How is it that God's promises become even more tangible when we're striving toward them with others (Hebrews 12:1-4)?

How can you be more intentional to pursue God's call together with your spouse? Your kids? Your friends? Your church community?

WEEK 6:

Sent to Wrestle

Jacob. What do you remember about his story? What kind of man is he like?

JACOB'S JADED PAST

Jacob is the second born son to Isaac and Rebekah, twin to his brother Esau. From the very beginning of his life we read of him wrestling with his brother in the womb (Genesis 25:22) and continued doing so upon their births (Genesis 25:25-26). Jacob's name literally means "he who grabs the heel" because that is how he came out—grabbing his brother's heel. That word, Jacob, as its meaning implies, comes to mean someone who deceives, lies, cheats and does anything to get ahead—just as we see Jacob in fact doing in multiple narratives. He is, as we find out, the continuation of the promise and covenant that goes from Abraham and Isaac (because he stole his brother's birthright through trickery). The text wants us to have us consider this question: How is it that THIS deceiver, liar, cheater and person who will do anything to get ahead is the one whom God chooses?

Decades after running away from his family and living outside of Canaan, Jacob flees from his father-in-law back home (Genesis 31). In doing so, he knows he will run into his brother Esau, who last we witnessed, tried to kill him (Genesis 27:41). This leads us to Genesis 32.

Read Genesis 32:3-12.

What is Jacob's reaction to the news that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with a small army (v. 6)?

As we have seen countless times in the past, the text again leads us to a point of conflict: God's promise is in jeopardy. If Jacob is killed, that ends the great rescue plan God started through Abraham.

What kind of prayer does Jacob pray to God in verses 9-12? Do you notice where Jacob seems to be holding God at ransom: "YOU said to me to go back" (v. 9); "YOU said I will make you prosper" (v. 12)? Do you ever find yourself praying this way—holding God's promises against Him? Why do we do that?

Read Genesis 32:13-21.

WEEK 6:

Sent to Wrestle *(continued)*

After Jacob prays, what does he do in response? Do his actions tell us he believed God would show up?

How often, when you pray for God to do something, do you then go out and just try and accomplish that request yourself?

Read Genesis 32:22-32.

What in the world is happening in this narrative?

Jacob (we are told the story from his point of view) believes, at first, some random, unidentifiable man has appeared to fight him. We are told in verse 25 this unnamed man "could not overpower" Jacob in the fight. We are told in verse 26 the man wanted to be let go, but Jacob would not do it. But then in verse 30, after the scene is finished, Jacob names the place "Peniel" which means "I saw God's face"—which means Jacob understood at some point the man he wrestled with was actually God.

If that's the case, why do you think God could not overpower or release Himself from Jacob... especially given the fact that with just one simple touch, He dislocates Jacob's hip? Why would God allow Himself to fight to a stalemate with a human who we know isn't that great of a guy?

At what point in the story do you think Jacob realizes that he isn't just wrestling with a mere mortal?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Names in the ancient world were exceedingly important. Names did not merely tell us a person's identity, but revealed their character. Every name you will find in the Bible means something significant—Moses means "scooped from the river", Adam means "dirt" (because man was created from the dust of the earth in Genesis 2), Eve mean "life", Jesus means "The LORD will save", etc. Names reflected purpose, destiny and spoke of what that person was truly like. Names in the ancient world, therefore, were not taken lightly. In fact, there was a belief that if you learned a person's true name (and thus their character), you held power over them. In the biblical text whenever you see one person asking for another's name, it means not only do they want to know who they are, but they are asking for a measure of control over that person

What does God ask Jacob in verse 27? Why does God want to know Jacob's name? Wouldn't He, as God, already know this?

When Jacob responds with his name, again, he is not merely telling God what his mother named him. He is revealing to God his true character. So when God says, "What is your name?" and Jacob replies, "Jacob"—what Jacob is really telling God is "I am a deceiver, a liar, a cheat, a person who will do anything necessary to get myself ahead" (this, as we already discovered, is what "Jacob" means). So what is happening here isn't merely an exchange of business cards, but Jacob's whole life and character being laid bare before God.

What does God then do in verse 28? Why would this be incredibly significant and transformative in Jacob's life?

The name "Israel" means "he who wrestles with God". It is clear why Jacob is given this name. But this, as we know, becomes the name for the whole of the people of God. How is this name fitting for them? How do we see this name play out in the Bible?

Do you ever feel like you wrestle with God? How so?

What is the end result of Jacob's fight with the Lord (see verse 29)? Why doesn't God tell Jacob His name?

Why is God's blessing for Jacob extremely important? Where and how has he tried to gain blessing for himself elsewhere? How is God's blessing different than his own pursuits?

Read Genesis 33:1-11.

How does this conflict of covenant end? How is story very much like another story in Luke 15:11-24?

How is Jacob different after his encounter with God than he was before (see verses 3, 10, 11)?

WEEK 6:

Sent to Wrestle *(continued)*

How are WE different after we struggle with God? Why is our life often like a wrestling with God?

Jacob fought with God, but didn't give up, didn't run away, didn't quit. He held on. And God let him ultimately prevail with a blessing. What's the lesson in this story for YOU?

What does it mean that we are SENT to wrestle with God?

WEEK 7:

Sent to Death

Read Genesis 37:2-11, 17-36.

Why would God grant Joseph the ability of prophetic dreams, only for this to result in his apparent death and slavery in Egypt?

How does this story put God's rescue plan (started through Abraham) into further conflict? Where does Joseph end up—is this the "land" that was promised to Abraham?

Read Genesis 39:1-20.

Again, we read of God's blessing over Joseph—that clearly God was working in and through Joseph. Why do you think that just when things seemed to be turning around for him, did Joseph sink further down—alone and forgotten in prison?

Compare this to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 and what Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 16:21-27.

If there was an invitation to sign up to follow Jesus and you were told that, in signing up, you would have the PROMISE of persecution, jail time, humiliation, torture, being shunned and laughed at, having really difficult things happen to you constantly, feeling alone and afraid and not knowing if God was really even there—would you sign up?

If someone were to examine what really motivates you to follow Jesus would they say you're in it only for the blessings he provides? What if those blessings were removed (except your salvation)—would you continue to follow Jesus then? Be honest!

Continue reading Genesis 40:1-23.

Why can't Joseph catch a break? Why do you think Joseph (as far as we can tell) remains hopeful and faithful even though he's alone, forgotten in prison? What does he really get that we often don't?

This story seems to be about human sin defeating godly faithfulness; in human contriving subverting and prevailing over God's plan.

How have you seen this play out in your own life?

When God does not seem to come through for you—either right away or in the way you wanted Him to—how do you respond? How does Joseph respond?

We find this same theme in the book of Job. At the end of the first chapter of Job, his children and wealth all get taken away. He responds by saying, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” Then at the end of the second chapter, Job’s health gets taken away. His wife yells, “Why are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!” To which Job replies, “You are talking like a foolish woman! Shall we accept the good from God, and not trouble?”

In what ways do YOU have difficulty with these statements?

These chapters in Genesis will have us consider how we will respond when life gets out of control and God seems powerless. Will we remain faithful in spite of suffering and death? How then, do you respond to this?

Consider these dilemmas:

If you were a missionary in a foreign country and after a decade of tireless work, there are no conversions to faith, no real interest in the gospel—would you continue in your work or give up and move home?

If you after struggling to get by with what you earn, someone in your family (or you yourself) gets very sick. Medical bills rack up and you find yourself in debt. Not only is your family member not getting better, but you simply cannot pay rent or buy groceries. You’ve prayed faithfully during this time, but no help or relief from the Lord has come. What do you do?

You attend church regularly. You go to a Bible study every week. You serve in a ministry. You strive, at home, to do devotionals and live a godly life. But you don’t feel fulfilled. You don’t hear from God. You feel like you’ve given up a lot for God but don’t think God has done His part. Then your partner leaves

WEEK 7:

Sent to Death *(continued)*

you. Your ministry leader gets upset at you for turning up late. Your bible study leader disagrees with your interpretation of the passage your studying. When church life is disappointing and dull, do you check out?

There are many other examples we can name, but the question of the text is this: do you accept the hard times with the good?

Jesus, Paul, Joseph and many others seem to agree: life is not easy and will not go the way we want it to a lot of the time. If we are sent to death, why should we stay faithful?

WEEK 8:

Sent to Life

Last week our text had us consider our motivations for following God. We read the beginning of Joseph's story (which comprises about 20 years in Egypt)—one of despair and hardship despite Joseph's continued trust in the Lord. Is God still faithful when life gets the better of us? And will WE stick with God when life is hard? This week, the conclusion of our study in Genesis, we are going to discover God's unveiling and fulfilling of His plan and promise—that despite repeated human attempts to subvert it, despite human sinfulness that stops it in its tracks, God ultimately wins.

Read Genesis 41:1-16, 37-52.

Several years pass while Joseph rots away in prison before Pharaoh's cupbearer (who promised to get Joseph out of prison in the previous chapter) remembers him and recommends him to Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. When he is finally summoned, who does Joseph instantly acknowledge (see verse 16)?

Who does Pharaoh acknowledge is behind Joseph's wisdom (see verses 38-39)?

What happens to Joseph and how does this relate back to God's promise to Abraham to "make his name great"?

Joseph's name means "May He (God) add to". In verse 45, Pharaoh gives Joseph an Egyptian name which means "God has said he will live". How are these names significant to the story, especially given the difficulties Joseph has already been through? How are the names of his kids significant (see verses 51-52)?

Read verses 53-57.

Why is verse 57 so crucial in understanding God's rescue plan that has been unfolding throughout Genesis? How does the promise God gave to Abraham begin to find its fulfillment in this verse?

A REFRESHER

Sin. It enters into God's perfect creation in Genesis 3. It first affects Adam and Eve's personal relationship with God as well as disharmony with each other. In Genesis 4, sin continues to spread and grow—resulting in the world's first murder. By the time we reach Noah in Genesis 6, we are told that the entire world is infected with sin—that it had gotten so bad and beyond repair, God decided to intervene. After the flood, sin continues to spiral out of control, moving beyond infecting merely individuals and families, but culture and society in general (Genesis 11). Sin had infested every space of the human realm. What was God's plan to deal with this problem? That restoration would start at an individual (Abraham), spread to a family, and continue reach out until all the cultures, societies and nations could come back into right relationship with God and one another.

How do we see this reconciliation/rescue plan playing out in Joseph's story (with individuals, families, cultures and nations being "blessed")?

Read Genesis 45:1-15

In the previous two chapters, amongst the people from every nation who came down to Egypt for food, we find Joseph's family from Canaan. They do not recognize their brother (probably because they don't expect him to be in the position that he is in) and are filled with fear.

Why does Joseph let his brother believe that he an Egyptian prince, rather than revealing himself to them as their brother?

In verse 5, Joseph says that this entire journey was directed by God. How does it make you feel that God sent not only the good things that happened to Joseph, but all the hardship that came with it? What purpose could God possibly have in allowing people to suffer?

Does the end (salvation for the family, preservation of God's promises) justify the means (hardship and suffering)?

What if this same scenario were to happen to you? Would you think God's ends justify His means?

WEEK 8:

Sent to Life *(continued)*

Read Genesis 50:15-21.

Here we find a fitting conclusion, not only to Joseph's story, but the whole book of Genesis. How does Joseph's statement—"What you intended for harm, God intended it for good to save many lives"—serve as what the whole book of Genesis is all about?

If this verse is the key to unlocking and understanding Genesis, what are you and I supposed to do with it in our own stories today?

How is the book of Genesis like one amazing love story?

How does the overall theme of Genesis directly relate to the life and death of Jesus?

What does it mean to you that though "in this world you will have trouble" the ultimate end of the story is that God leaves you His peace (John 16:33)?

Read Romans 8:35-39.

How do these verses fit into the story of Genesis? How should these verses motivate us to be SENT into God's amazing love story, being a blessing to the entire world?

