

Activities and Extra Credit

1. Read Genesis 25:27-34. This story is part of how Jacob inherited Isaac's land instead of Esau. In the spirit of this story, plan to cook a meal together as a whole family. If you want to cook lentil soup and bread like Jacob and Esau had, find a recipe online or in a cookbook and try it out! If lentil soup doesn't sound appetizing, find some other favorite family meal and cook it together.
2. Visit someone in a nursing home or an elderly shut in. Often times our society ignores the elderly. As we see in the story of Abraham and Sarah, though, God certainly does not ignore them. Sit and talk with the person. Offer to bring them dinner or dessert. While you are there, try to have them discuss their religious beliefs or try to have them talk about going to church as a child. If they don't have religious beliefs, find a time in the conversation to tell them God loves them and still has big plans for them. Pray beforehand that God gives you the opportunity and the words you need to say to comfort the person and give them hope, if need be.
3. Read Psalm 139:23-24. Find some quiet time to reflect on this verse and ask God to search you and purify you. Ask Him to bring to your attention things in your life that are idols or that are keeping you from experiencing God the way He created us to. Share with one other person in your family (or another trusted Christian) what God brought to your attention and ask them to pray for you as you and God work to give you a pure, circumcised heart.
4. Commit to participating in TLC's "Ask the Lord" time on Saturday, October 15 from 10am-noon. Practice hearing God's voice and following Him just as Abraham did. You get the opportunity to serve your community as well.

Question without an easy answer: People often say that God will never ask you to do something that is not biblical. But in the story of Abraham and Isaac, God asked Abraham to kill his son and killing a person is against God's law. How can this be reconciled? How can you know you are hearing from God?

God Builds a Nation Family Devotions for Week 2

Day One: God calls Abram

1. This week's reading opens up with God telling Abram to leave his country because He is going to make Abram's descendants into a great nation and bless him beyond imagination. The only problem was God didn't tell Abram where he was to go. Put yourself in Abram's shoes. What if God told you to sell your house, pick up your family and leave, but gave you no further instructions, just a promise about how it will end? How would you feel? How much would you have to trust God to follow through? Is there a time in your life where you felt like you just had to dive into something on faith without knowing any of the long-term plans about how to make it happen? What did you learn from it?
2. God tells Abram that he is going to have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky or sand on the seashore. This seems impossible to Abram and his wife Sarai because they seemed to be too old to have children and they were childless. Have you ever done something that seemed impossible? Why do you think God promises things that seem impossible to us?
3. After waiting 11 years for God to provide him a child with Sarai, Abram and Sarai decide to take matters into their own hands and have Abram father a baby with their servant Hagar. Is there a time when you got tired of waiting on God to come through for you and took matters into your own hands? Read Psalm 27:14. What does it mean to wait on God? How do you know when to wait on God or when to step out in faith and work toward the goal God has for you?
4. Hagar gives God the name, "You are the God who sees me." How is this name and character trait consistent with the name Immanuel given to Jesus in Matthew 1:23? Talk about why you are thankful for this particular trait of God.

Day Two: God is faithful in building His nation

1. Names seem to be important to God. When God makes His covenant with Abram, He changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah. Can you think of anyone else in the Bible that got his or her name changed by God? Why do you think God does this? Now think about your own name. What does your name say about you? If you don't know why your parents chose your particular name for you, ask them.
2. Part of God's covenant with Abraham is that he and all his male descendants need to be circumcised. If you need to, discuss what a circumcision is so everyone in the discussion understands it. Why do you think God has them do this? Read Romans 2:28-29. Paul stresses that it is not the physical circumcision that is important, but the circumcision of the heart. Do you think that God's view of circumcision changed between the time of Abraham and the time of Paul or do you think He views them the same way? If He views them the same way, then what did the physical circumcision need to represent for the person being circumcised?
3. Many families today are "blended" in some way because of divorce or remarriage. Even in families where the parents have stayed together, tension can arise between in-laws or siblings. These kinds of tensions appear in Abraham's family as tension between Sarah and Hagar appear on the day celebrating when Isaac stopped breastfeeding. Have you ever experienced a situation similar to this one? How did you handle the situation? Can you relate to Abraham's concern? Can you relate to the way Sarah feels? Can you relate to Hagar and her feelings of desperation? How did they decide whom to listen to?
4. After so many years of God promising Abraham that he will be the father of a nation, but God not giving Sarah a child, when God finally does give Abraham a child, He later tells him to take the boy on a mountain to sacrifice him. How frustrating would this be for Abraham? What about Abraham was God testing? What does it mean "your offspring will be reckoned" through Isaac? How does this story tie in with God sacrificing His "one and only son"?

Day Three: Jacob's Inheritance

1. Think about a time when you felt like someone was acting as if they were better than you or above you. How did it make you feel? Now think of a time when someone acted as though you held a higher position than they did. How did you feel then? Why did Jacob want his servants to refer to him as Esau's servant when they talked to Esau? Read Matthew 20:25-28. What lesson can we learn between seeing how Esau responded to Jacob and how Jesus talks about how to be great? What does that actually look like in our life? Why is this so important in reconciling bad relationships?
2. With who was Jacob wrestling? Has there ever been a time in your life where you wrestled with God? Discuss those times. How did it get resolved? Is there anything you are wrestling with God about right now? What things can you do to resolve the conflict you are having with God?
3. God changes Jacob's name to Israel, because he struggled with God and humans and he overcame. God calls His new nation Israel as well. If you know about the history of the nation of Israel, talk about how that name is fitting for the nation. How is that name fitting to us as well?
4. After God told Jacob to go to Bethel and build an altar there, Jacob told his household and everyone that was with him to get rid of their foreign gods, purify themselves and change their clothes. Why would Jacob have them do this? Read Matthew 5:8. What does Jesus say will happen to those who are "pure in heart"? Is there any other benefit that would come from Jacob's request? As a family, spend some time discussing things in your life or in your house that represent "foreign gods" or anything that you treat as an idol (an idol is anything that you consider more important than God). Is it possible to get rid of those things? If not, could you try fasting from them (such as sweets or TV)? Discuss some of the warning signs that may show that something is becoming an idol in your life.