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GENESIS 17

Series: Understanding Your Roots

Well given all that's going on in our world, I think we need to pray. So would you join with me in prayer please?

[PRAYER] Lord, sometimes we just feel angry about what's going on. Sometimes we just feel so sad about what's happening. Sometimes we feel anxious about things that are going on. So Lord, we need you. We ask for your peace. We ask for your peace in our own hearts. We need that. But Lord, we need peace in our country. There's so much hurt and divisiveness, and people aren't even willing to talk to each other in many cases. So Lord, we're just asking for you to shine your light in the midst of this. We know that your church is a very powerful force in this world and we're asking you to help us focus on the true message that you've called us to share, a message of hope in Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray that you'd raise up leaders who would help direct people to you and to your message. I pray that we'd be able to rise above the politics and the disagreements and the challenges, to focus in on the unity we have in you.

Lord, I thank you for your church and I thank you that your church is this place where people from all different kinds of backgrounds can come together and worship together and experience that unity. Lord, we so want to share what we experience in your church with other people. Lord, we ask that it would start in our own hearts. That we would be able to experience your joy and your peace and your love inside of us in such a powerful way that it just exudes out from us and other people say, "What's going on with you? How come you're not under the circumstances like everyone else?" But yet, Lord, we are sharing our testimony of who you are and what you want to do in our lives.

Lord, we know a lot of good things are happening. There is a lot of evidence of your goodness and sometimes we don't get to see that because we see all of the badness that's going on. So we ask that you would help us to shift our focus. Help us to see what you're doing. Where there's opportunity, give us that opportunity to be peacemakers, to bring the message of reconciliation to a world that so needs it. Pray that our conversations would not just be complaining conversations that we have with others, but that we would be salted as you want us to have our speech seasoned with salt, salted with hope and joy. Lord, we ask that you would help us to be real and connected with other people and help them feel their pain and help us feel their pain, but at the same time be able to hold on to your love and your hand to draw them out of the mire and the muck of the things that are going on around.

Lord, we need you today in our own personal lives. We ask that you would use this message from your word today to teach us, to excite us, to inspire us to look at you more and to see you

more. So we ask for your blessing today, Lord. Your blessing on us personally, on our church, on the Christian community in the United States. We ask your blessing on the leadership in our states, in our country. And we ask that your Holy Spirit would be working in the lives of people in a powerful way. We look to you, Lord, for our salvation. We look to you for our hope. We look to you for our security. And we trust you today. In Jesus' name, amen.

When I was growing up I grew up in a Christian home with parents who really had it together. I'm really grateful. My dad every evening before we went to bed he would play game with us. I remember playing games with my dad as a preschooler, elementary, even early teenager, we were playing games regularly. We played chess, we played rummy. Sometimes my dad would trounce me and sometimes I would trounce him (later realizing he let me win). But still, there was just this enjoyment of playing games.

But there was something else that was going on because my dad would make comments in the midst of those games. "Oh you got me there." "Oh you're really good there." It's the comments that he made about the games that really influenced me quite a bit in how I perceived myself and what that did for me. My dad was not just playing the game. He was playing a second game. There was always a second game for him when he played these games. I wasn't even aware of that. When I had my own children I realized that sometimes I play a second game with them. I'm not just playing the game that's there. I'm playing another game, a very important game and that is how I treat them and how I talk to them.

In fact I began to realize as I grew in my life that this second game is always present. It's not just happening in games. There's always a second game in life. That there's the people that are caught up in the work that they're doing and the making of money and the paying of the bills and getting their car repaired and fixing their house up. That's all the things that are going on. But there's something else going on above that. I realize that is what God is calling us to. He's continually calling us to look above the things that are going on down here to another something bigger and better and important.

I'm sure that's why in Colossians 2 the Bible says – *Look at things above. Set your hearts on things above, not on earthly things.* Because there's this different way of thinking about life. You can call it a game. The word 'game' is a little bit misleading because we know life isn't a game. It's real. But there's a different way to think bigger about life.

Sometimes I talk to young people, especially young people who don't like to lose. You know they can't play a game without getting mad if they lose the game. Or they're having sibling conflict issues. Sometimes I will talk to them and I'll explain to them about the second game. Many times when they understand that there's another game being played they rise above the first game and they're able to enjoy the second game and the influence they have on their brothers and sisters or the way they talk about how they play the game. Very important.

Last year one young man, an eleven-year-old boy...I explained it all to him. I thought I did a great job explaining it to him. and he says, "I don't want to play that game. I still want to win." I said to him, "Oh that's too bad because you know if you always want to play the first game and

that's where you're stuck, you're going to experience a lot of sadness in your life. You're going to be disappointed a lot because you're going to lose sometimes. You're going to be angry a lot because you're going to feel like someone else got the better deal. You're going to feel anxious about life. All of those things you're going to get sucked in. In order for us to experience the fullness of what God has for us, we must rise above that to these things above."

I think about that story in 2 Kings 6 where the servant went out to get the water for the morning. And when he went there he saw all of this army around. Pretty scary experience when you get up in the morning and you look at the news and you see all kinds of bad things going on in the world. He runs back in the house and he says to Elisha, "Oh lord, what are we going to do about this?" Those were his words. "What are we going to do? Oh lord, what are we going to do?" (Lord being the master.) What are we going to do? And the master says this. Elisha says, "*Those who are with us are greater than those who are out there.*" The servant says, "I don't get it. There's an army out there. Bad things going on. Lots of bad things going on back there. We're stuck. I'm upset about this. What are you going to do?" Elisha says, "*Lord, open up his eyes.*" And God did. And when He opened up his eyes he saw an angelic army surrounding the whole house, protecting them from any kind of forces that were out there.

Now how do you think that servant felt when he went back out there to pick up his bucket he dropped on the ground? He goes back out there, his head's held high, he's looking around like "Hey, I'm not worried about you guys because I've got the Lord." The Lord has shown me something bigger. He's shown me the second game. There's always a second game. There's always something going on that's bigger.

Today we're going to look at Abraham and we're going to see that Abraham needed this message. He needed to know that he needed to think bigger in his life. I'm going to challenge you today. You need to think bigger in your life.

We're studying right now the book of Genesis verse by verse. In chapter 16-18 we're looking at a fractured family. It's a family where a husband is married to a wife, but a husband has a child by another woman. You could take this story and move it into the 21st century. Just look around at your neighbors. It's the same story. The beauty of this story is God is at work in the midst of a fractured family. I just want to suggest if you've been disappointed in family life, I want you to see that God is working in the midst of this. I don't want you to be defeated that things did not turn out the way you would like in your family. God is at work. We see that in these chapters. The beauty of this story is that God steps into the lives of these people and He's going to deal with the tension and things, but He's going to deal with each person individually.

Last week we learned about Hagar because that's where God started. He started with Hagar. You see we learn in chapter 16:1 that she had an attitude problem. A few verses later we learn that she's being emotionally mistreated or emotionally abused and she runs away. Which would be the counsel of many counselors today. Many friends would tell her if you're being emotionally abused you should get out of that situation. Sometimes that is the right thing to do. In fact in Genesis 21 she does leave and God encourages her in the process of leaving. But in this chapter He doesn't do that. He says to her, "Look. You need to go back into that situation and change the way you respond. You've got some things to learn in the midst of this." That seems like a pretty

harsh statement except when you read the rest of the passage. Because if you read the rest of the passage He says, “And I am the one who sees you. And I’m the one who’s heard you. And I’m going to support you. You can feel cared for as a single mom in the midst of these challenging situations.”

God sees our brokenness, He sees our disappointment, He sees the challenges that we have when we have to go back to a situation that we’d rather not go back into. But we know we have to go back into that job. We have to go back into that situation in the family or we have to go back into that school situation. God knows that, so He’s with her supporting her in that situation. Beautiful story in Genesis 16.

But today we look at Genesis 17 because now we’re going to shift. Because God is the Counselor now. He’s going to move over and help Abraham deal with his issues. Next week we’re going to look at Sarah because God’s going to help her deal with her issues in chapter 18. But we’re going to right now focus in on how God is going to work with Abraham in Genesis 17.

The father of nations. A guy who’s known to be this great person. Here’s a guy who is financially successful. He had all kinds of herds and herdsmen. He had so much wealth he had 318 fighting men that were born into his own household it says. That’s a lot of people. He’s got a huge business. I don’t know what you’d call this. Empire, whatever he has. He also was one of those guys that in this pursuit goes and conquers these kings and he brings back Lot, as we’ve already read. Here’s a successful guy. He’s doing well out there in all those things. But he’s not doing too well in his own family. It’s not uncommon for a man to be doing well out there in business, out there in his job, but having trouble being the spiritual leader in his own home.

So we see that when his wife comes and says, “Hey, I’ve got this great idea. Why don’t you take Hagar.” Instead of coming and saying, “Okay, let’s ask the Lord if that’s a good idea,” he just says, “Okay fine.” Now you have to realize his wife was a difficult woman we’re going to see. She seems to be one of those that’s a blamer. She doesn’t take responsibility. She’s judgmental, critical. Which makes it hard for a guy to lead when the wife is being that way. But still, it’s no excuse for him. When Sarah comes back and accuses him saying, “Look what you’ve done now,” it was her idea in the first place. But she comes back and accuses Abraham and says, “Look what you’ve done. Now we’ve got this problem.” Abraham just says, “It’s not my problem. You deal with it.” That’s what he says. Instead of saying, “Okay, let’s get together. Let’s solve this together.” He’s not being the leader he needs to be. By the end of chapter 17 he will be. He’s going to be a spiritual leader in his own home by the end of chapter 17.

We’re going to get there. In order to get there we’re going to start at the beginning of the chapter because God has a message for Abraham and this is the message: Think bigger. Get out of your little worldview that you think is all that God is. Get out of that and think bigger.

I’m excited to share this passage with you because as we go into this passage you’re going to see the steps necessary for you to think bigger. You’re going to see how God the Counselor comes into Abraham’s presence and He helps him to understand something very important in his own life.

Genesis 17:1 – *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”*

If you’re going to think bigger and move outside of the earthly plain and allow God to do something big in your life, you’re going to have to number one, recognize how big God is. Notice the verse. It says in verse 1 – God says to him, *“I am God Almighty.”* It is the very first time in the Bible that this name for God is ever used. God Almighty. Literally it’s the words El-Shaddai. El means God. Shaddai means mighty, or shad means breast. So it’s the source of strength, the source of comfort that’s going to come to you. Recognize that God is this source in your life. If you’re going to move off of this earthly plain and you’re going to learn how to play the second game, if you’re going to learn how to think bigger, you must understand how big God is. He is the source.

Here’s what it means on a practical level. When you get your paycheck, most of you probably have automatic deposits, so it comes into your bank account. But when you see it there you don’t say, “My job is the source of my income.” That’s not what you say. What you say is, “God is the source of my income, it just comes through my job.” See, God is the source of your income. If you get one of those stimulus checks that appears in your bank account or in your mail, you don’t say, “Oh good, the government gave me a stimulus check.” You don’t say that. You say, “God gave me this money. He’s the source, it just came through the government.” If you’re sick and you experience healing, you don’t say, “Oh well that’s because of the medication. That’s because of the doctor.” They are only the vehicles. It is God who has given you. He is the source.

He is so big and we need to realize that God is the source of all of those things that come in our lives. When something good happens to you in your life you want to recognize that God is the one who is the source. You need to think bigger about God. If you’re going to think bigger in life, the first step is you want to recognize how big God is. He’s the source.

One single mom told this story that her six-year-old daughter came to her and asked her, “Mom, could I have a bike? My friend down the street has a bike. I want a bike too.” Mom says, “Honey, we can’t afford a bike. I’m sorry. I just don’t have the money to buy you a bike. But let’s do this. Let’s pray. Let’s pray and ask that God will provide you a bike.” So they prayed. “Lord, would you please provide a bike for me,” she prayed.

The next day they were driving down the road and they see a man carrying a bike down to the street. They stop the car. The lady gets out and says to him, “Excuse me, are you throwing that bike out?”

He says, “Well I wasn’t going to throw it out, but I’m putting it down in the street because we’ve outgrown it and we were thinking someone else might like this bike.”

She says, “We’re the ones. We want that bike. We’ll take that.”

He says, “Great! Here it is!” and gave it to her.

Now what do you think happened in that prayer time that night? Do you think that little girl says, “Oh I’m so glad for that man putting that bike out.” No. She said, “God, thank you for the bike.”

God is the source of our strength. He's the one who provides us with what we need. It's because of God's grace that we have. If we're going to be able to rise above the earthly things, then we must recognize who God is. He's very big. If you have a problem arguing with your kid then you're stuck in this earthly plain. Oh yeah, kids, we need to be able to discipline them, but we can't be arguing and getting into that.... See the earthly plain has this ability to suck us in with our emotions to get us sucked into dynamics that we shouldn't be involved in. This earthly plain has all kinds of challenges. In order to rise above that we first must recognize this message that Abraham is getting that God is big. Very important message that Abraham understands. In order to be able to think bigger about his world and about life for him.

We'll notice his response in verse 3. It says – *Then Abram fell on his face.* I'm just telling you, whenever you recognize how big God is, you are humbled by that to recognize how small you are. In fact I would suggest the second thing, if you're going to think bigger about life, if you're going to play the game of life differently and not just get caught up in the earthly things, but have your heart set on heavenly things then you're, one, going to recognize how big God is, but secondly, recognize how small you are yet valuable. That's the message you're going to see right here in the passage. Abraham is small yet valuable.

Notice it says – *And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram,"* which means valued father, high father, something like that. It means father. In other words father – you have a kid and you're part of a family. You're the father. *No longer shall your name be Abraham, but your name shall be Abraham,* which means *father of multitudes.* God is saying to Abraham, "You need to think bigger, buddy. This isn't just about getting one son. This is about lots of kids. Multitudes."

He goes on to explain it to him. *"For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*

Now remember this isn't like a salvation experience for Abraham. This isn't his first encounter with God. He's had several of these encounters with God and I would suggest that we need to do that too in our own lives. Remember God called Abraham out of Ur. Come on Abraham, let's take you over to Palestine. Well he leaves Ur and goes to Haran. He calls him again out of Haran and takes him to Palestine where he's working in his life there. In Genesis 15 He takes him outside and He says, "You see those stars up there? If you can count the stars, that's how many descendants you will have." So many stars. So many descendants that you're going to have in your life. That's chapter 15. But it's chapter 17 here. This is going to be one of those memorable experiences in his life when God connected him in a way that was bigger than the normal stuff.

I pray every week that God will speak to me as I am studying His word so that I will have something to share with you that God has shared with me. That is my goal every week to do that. But there are some times in my life where God has made big statements. It's kind of like those

ones that I remember as monumental statements in my history. I got saved when I was three years old. That decision was nurtured in my own heart by my parents and by the Holy Spirit. That became my salvation experience. When I was fourteen years old, I committed myself to full time Christian ministry as a result of being challenged by my youth leader. That was something I remember clearly that God was doing in my heart.

Let me tell you about another important experience in my own life. I'd been a pastor for nineteen years when I really was getting burned out with the church. This church tended to be a lot more political. So I loved the church, it was just the people I didn't like. So I was trying to relate and I was feeling frustrated with all of this. And in the course of things my whole family and I went to Africa for a sabbatical. But for that period of eight years working in that church I was really trying to grow this church. I'm not trying to be selfish and just focus on numbers, but numbers are one indication that good things are happening somewhere. We worked hard to just be godly and do what we needed to do, but it just wasn't working. The highest attendance we ever had at that church was 156. I remember that number because I always wondered are we ever going to get back to 156 again? That was on an Easter Sunday sometime. And I always wondered about that number 156, when we'd get to the next number.

Well I went on sabbatical and I was done frankly with the church. I decided I was going to go into business. I feel like I could do pretty well making money in business, so that was my decision to do that. Our time in Africa was kind of a break and figuring out what we were going to do next. I had a business man I was dialoguing with in Mercer County and I really liked him, a Christian guy. I felt like I could do well in business and he could get me started. So it all seemed like a great thing for me to be involved in. But about halfway through our nine-month sabbatical in Africa God changed my heart. I recommitted myself to ministry.

The story continues, but we came back then to Mercer County and started another church. So we started with a Bible study. Would anybody come to the Bible study? After a few weeks, just a few weeks, we had sixty people. Sixty people at the Bible study, many people I had never met before. They're at a Bible study. We couldn't meet in my home anymore. Now we're meeting at a community center with sixty people. We don't have any children's program. That's not counting any children. So we decide we're going to start meeting on Sunday morning. We chose a date in the summer to start meeting and on that date it was amazing crazy day. Because we had so many people. We had a full children's program. We didn't even know all the people working with our children. Some guy had said during the Bible study, "Hey, can I bring my guitar and lead worship?" I said, "Fine, do it." Well he pulls together a whole worship team. All of this stuff that goes on in order to be a church on a Sunday morning all came together on that one Sunday. Oh believe me, we were running all around trying to make everything work, but the Lord pulled it all together and we had a great Sunday.

At the end of the Sunday service I said to someone, "Boy, we had a lot of people here today. How many people were here?"

"156."

I said, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I counted. 156 people." That person didn't know that I had this number 156 in my mind from this previous experience. You know what God was saying to me in this situation? He's

saying, “I’ve got this. Don’t worry about it. You’re doing the right thing. God has called you to be a pastor. Let’s go forward.” It just was so transforming in my life.

I think that’s the kind of experience that Abraham is having in this passage. That he needs to think bigger about God, think bigger about life, and it starts number one with seeing how big God is. He is the El Shaddai. Secondly to recognize how small but valuable we are in God’s kingdom program.

Let me take you to the next verses. He says – *And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you.*

Now what He’s going to say here is the third thing we need. If you’re going to move from the mundane to the spiritual, if you’re going to think bigger in your life, if you’re going to play the second game on a daily basis in your home, in your work, in your neighborhood, while you’re driving, if it’s going to affect you and you’re going to be this other person that God wants you to be, you need those three things which are view God as big; secondly, recognize who you are, that you are small yet valuable; and thirdly, you need to take steps to enter into that. To agree that, yes, I’m going to be different.

That’s what Abraham’s going to be. He’s going to be different. Now God’s going to say, “I’m going to call you. You’re going to be different than anybody else, but I want you to accept that, take it on, and say yes I’m going to do it.”

Let’s see what he does. It says – *Every male among you shall be circumcised.* That means you’re going to be different than the others, circumcised. *You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”* So there’s this presentation of who God is, who we are, but we must participate in that.

We’re going to talk about circumcision. Now I remember when I was a teenager and I first started hearing about circumcision I really didn’t know what it is. So I’m going to discreetly describe what it is for you young people who might be listening and wondering what it is. What it is, there’s a piece of skin (unnecessary piece of skin) on the male private part that gets cut off. So when that is cut off, that person, that little baby, or that man is circumcised. Now we take a lot of baggage from our culture into that and most of us guys are already cringing as we think about it. And some of you ladies too are saying oh that seems so painful, and I’m sure it is. But let me give you a couple of pieces of information that will help you understand it more culturally.

When I went to Africa and in my class where I was teaching Bible and other things in my family classes, somehow we were talking about circumcision. I explained in my class that in America (I had people from nine tribes in my class). I said in America our babies are circumcised in the hospital before they leave the hospital. Those who are going to get circumcised are circumcised there in the hospital before they leave. And one of my students said, “Oh that’s too bad.”

I said, “Well what do you mean?”

“Well they wouldn’t feel anything.”

I said, “Yeah, that’s the point. But maybe you should explain what you’re saying.”

“Well,” he says, “in our tribe we aren’t circumcised until we are in our early adolescence (twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old) we’re circumcised and it’s a ceremonial rite into manhood.”

I said, “Well tell me more. I’d like to hear what you’re saying.”

He says, “Well what we do is we go down usually it’s a group of guys are getting this at the same time. But go into the water where it’s cold and they’ll kind of numb everything up and then they’ll come up and it used to be the witch doctors would do this, but now some medical professional does this minor surgery on these guys and we are now men. We’ve moved into this new status of life.”

I’m going, “Well that is very interesting.” I prefer the baby part. But I understand what they’re saying. So they weren’t afraid of it. It was something that was part of what they were doing.

They’re entering into something. We want to be adults.

I think what God is saying to us in all of this is we need to make a choice to move to the next level in our own lives. You might say well I don’t get this, it’s such a private thing. Well it’s private because when you men take a shower, you take a shower in a shower with the door closed. No one else is in there. When I was in Africa I remember my first trip to Africa I had this big movie camera thing. I had never been to Africa before and I was taking pictures of things that were going on. I stopped on this road at one point because there were some guys over there kind of playing on some rocks by the water. So I decided to film them and I said to them, “Jump in the water!” I didn’t know what they were going to do. But what these young teen boys did was stripped all their clothes off, jumped in naked into the water while I’m filming this whole thing. I’m going, “Oh wow, that’s really different. Not what I had expected.” I suspect that the privacy issues were a little bit different in the culture where we’re talking about when they bathed down at the river or they went swimming or something else. It was obvious or could be obvious that these were circumcised or not circumcised.

The point of this whole story is this: That God is calling them to be different. He’s calling them out. When God created the church He calls it the church. The word is *ecclesia*, the called-out ones. If you want to think bigger, if you want to recognize what God is doing, then you’re going to move into this new stage of life where you are committed. However painful it might be, you’re saying, “Okay Lord, I’m going to be different even though it might be painful. I’m willing to accept what you are saying to me. I am willing to be different. I am willing to stand out. I am willing to allow you to work in my life.” That is what God is saying to them in this passage.

Let’s go on and read some more. In Genesis 17:15 it says – *And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.”* We’re going to talk more about her next week, but let’s read this anyway. It says – *“I will bless her, and*

moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” See, her name has changed to Sarah. Sarah means princess, royalty. Kings will come from her.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “I have an idea.” Which we often do. “God, I have an idea. Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” Let’s just make this Ishmael and call it quits, God. Let’s do it here. God says no, no, no. And that’s the word. Sometimes God says no. Here’s an example in the scripture where God says no to an idea that someone had. Just keep that in mind. God said straight out, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.” This is going to get real now. This time next year.

What God is saying to Abraham is “Abraham, you need to think bigger. Don’t get stuck in what you’ve got going on here. Think bigger. I am who I am. I’m God. You need to see how small you are yet valuable. You need to be willing to enter into the promise, enter into the covenant, be different. Think bigger in your life.”

Well is Abraham going to do it? Yes, he is. And this is how the end of the chapter takes place. Abraham says, “Okay, I’m going to be the leader in my family. I’m going to be the spiritual leader. Here’s what I’m going to do.” It says – *When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.*

So we see Abraham takes the action. He says, “Yes, God. I’m going to do this. I’m going to think bigger. I’m going to be part of what you want to do. I’m eager to go forward. Yes.” That is the answer we need to give to the Lord. The answer is yes, I want to think bigger.

I like the story of the two boys, seven years old, five years old, that came down for breakfast to find that their mom had made some pancakes. These weren’t the ordinary pancakes. These were the big pancakes, only one in a pan. So the boys were arguing about who’s going to get the first pancake. “I want to the first pancake.” “No, I want the first pancake.” They’re arguing back and forth. Mom turns to the boys and says, “If Jesus were here, He would say to His brother, ‘You can have the first pancake.’” The boys were quiet for a minute. Then the older one says to the younger one, “You be Jesus.”

See, I think that's how a lot of people are in the world. Even Christians now, people who are committed to Jesus Christ are saying, "You be Jesus. I want to stay on the earthly plain." There's a payment for staying on the earthly plain. There's a lot of weighing down that takes place and tension and internal turmoil. Bad things happen when you stay on the earthly plain. You've got to move up to this next plain. And that's the plain of setting your hearts on things above, not on earthly things. In order to do that, you need to think bigger. That's what Abraham needed. That's what we need in our lives and I trust that God will take His finger and put it on a special place in your heart where you need to think bigger. Because you may be getting dragged down in a particular area, but God has something bigger to do in your life in that particular area.

Well that's Abraham. Next week we come to Sarai. I can hardly wait to tell you about the things we're going to learn from her and her life next week.

But maybe you've come to a place in your life where you recognize you're stuck in this first plain and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. I just want to encourage you to pray and ask God to come into your life. To recognize that God is God, that you are not God. That you are small but valuable. But God sent Jesus Christ to die for you for your sins. When you accept Him into your life you enter in this new plain of thinking that changes your whole life, changes the way you think. And then you look around and even in an earthly plain you see the evidence of God's goodness where you are. I just love that song. Don't you? The evidence of God's goodness. It's just such a great song, we're going to sing it again now. So I trust that you'll be ministered to and allow the Lord to speak to you in the midst of this song. What is He saying to you? What does He want you to do in your own life and in your own heart?

Stand with me and let's pray and then we'll sing this song together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I am just tickled with this story about Abraham. I'm seeing Genesis in new ways that I have not seen before and I thank you for the things you're sharing with me. I know, Holy Spirit, that you speak to each one of us individually. You're like the counselor for us. So I ask, Lord, that you would speak today to each person. Touch their hearts, each young person, to understand who you are and what you want for their lives. Lord, I pray that you'd raise up a generation of young people who are willing to think bigger about your plan and what you're doing. In Jesus' name, amen.