



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG69: Transforming Presence (2/6)
Transforming Call

Genesis 17:1-16

Home Group Study Notes

13th May 2012 - Revd Tom Loh



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Can you think of any situations when you asked someone to follow you, and they did without question?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) Genesis 17:1. The Lord appears to Abraham and calls him to walk before him. Why do you think people like Abraham so readily gave up everything to follow the Lord at a word? Why do others not?

2) Genesis 17:1. Why does the Lord God wait until Abraham is ninety-nine before promising him a son?

3) Genesis 17:3-7. Who exactly are Abraham's descendants? And what are they promised? (Galatians 3:15-18, 26-29 is a fascinating interpretation of Abraham's true "seed").

Rather, Abraham did many incredible works because he was saved by faith in Christ.

Therefore, those of us who trust in Christ alone for our salvation are Abraham's children (Galatians 3:6-9). When we trust in Jesus, we are doing exactly the same thing our forefather Abraham did. And when we want to learn how to live the Christian life, the New Testament writers tell us to look at and learn from Abraham (Romans 4, Gal 3, Hebrews 11:8-19, 39 – 12:3).

Conclusion

When the Lord called Abraham, he responded in loving trust. He did not hold onto his life. Abraham's faith in Christ saved him and transformed him into someone who built his life on the promises of the gospel. True faith does not try to walk a fine line between trusting in Christ and trusting in the things of the world, but rather it is prepared to abandon everything in order to follow Him. Why? Because Jesus is altogether lovely and trustworthy, and he has prepared a future for us that is free from the dangers and harms of this Age, a future that is so secure and eternal that we find ourselves letting go of the things we used to hold onto so tightly. Jesus says it most clearly when he says: **"If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"** (Mark 8:34-36).

Bishop Stephen has called us to be a "Transforming Presence" in our parish and in our lives. The life of Abraham certainly caused many people to either join the Lord's community, or flee from it. When we respond to the call of Jesus, our lives dramatically transform. We become challenging to unbelievers because we choose not to hope in the same things they do. Our Christian communities become like lights in the darkness, which many will be drawn to, but also that many will flee from. However, often we can feel like our lives are no different from the world around us. More often than not we share the same fears, hopes and failures. The call to follow Christ is a daily call. When we hear Jesus' call and follow him, our hearts become increasingly warmed to him, and we find that the world with all its fears and temptations - that once held such a tight grip on our lives - slips away. In Jesus we find freedom.

**Living God,
Draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
To live your love with generosity and joy, imagination and courage;
For the sake of your world and in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits. (It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda)

God might not be calling us to sacrifice our children (in fact, I am pretty positive his isn't), but he is testing us to see if we truly do believe in the resurrection. Every day we are faced with choices that reveal whether we really believe God will grant us life after death - choices regarding everything from what we eat and drink, where we live, what we plan for, what we look forward to, what we talk about, what we enjoy, what we buy, what we invest in, and how we spend our time. Almost everything we do speaks volumes of what we trust in. God tells us that in Christ we have eternal life, and that one day he will raise our bodies to new, immortal lives, just like he did for Jesus. Do we really believe him? (John 11:23-27).

Abraham: Trusted in the New Creation

One of the great promises we read about in Genesis 17:8 is that God will give to Abraham the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. This has given rise to many strong views of the present land of Israel.

However, what is interesting about Abraham is that when he arrived in Canaan he chose to live in tents rather than build permanent dwellings. After all the journeying and self-sacrifice, why doesn't Abraham settle down after receiving his eternal reward? Was it because he couldn't afford to build a home? Was it because he was used to the nomadic life? No. The Bible tells us that he lived in tents because Abraham knew that the land of Canaan was not the true and real Promised Land God had promised him and his descendants.

In Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-16, we read that Abraham lived in tents because he wanted to demonstrate that he was nothing more than a stranger in a foreign country, passing through on his way to the real Promised Land - the eternal, heavenly, City of God. The land of Canaan was only ever a small picture of the true Promised Land, the New Creation hope that will come about when Jesus returns on the last day (Matthew 5:5, Heb 12:22, Rev 21:1-5). Abraham recognised that this was what God was really promising him, and to make this clear to everyone he chose to live in non-permanent dwellings. It must have been very tempting to use his wealth and power to build an empire in Canaan, but as a true follower of the Lord, he put his treasures in what was imperishable, kept in heaven for him (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Abraham did not blindly follow God, but followed and trusted in Christ and the gospel truths of atonement for sin, and the resurrection. He didn't just believe, he demonstrated that his whole life was built upon the gospel of Christ.

Abraham: Saved by Faith in Christ.

What we learn through the amazing life of Abraham is that salvation comes through trusting in Christ. For all the amazing adventures, the one thing that Scripture emphasises above all about Abraham was that he was made righteous by his faith, **“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness,”** (Genesis 15:6, cited in Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23). Therefore, Abraham was righteous not because he was without sin, but because he was given the righteousness of Christ through faith in Him. Abraham was not saved because of his many good works, and neither are we.

4) Genesis 17:8. If Abraham was to receive Canaan as an everlasting possession, why did he live in tents (Gen 12:8)?

5) Think about the life of Abraham and Sarah, in what ways did their actions demonstrate what they believed? Can you think of examples of how our actions and decisions in life have demonstrated what we believe?

6) Bishop Stephen has called us to be a “Transforming Presence” in our parish. Can you think of ways in which we could visually demonstrate that we are a people who are called to abandon our worldly hopes and follow Jesus?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG69: Transforming Presence (2/6) *Transforming Call*

Genesis 17:1-16

Home Group Sermon Notes

13th May 2012 - Revd Tom Loh

Abraham: the Man of Faith

The Bible often refers to Abraham as the man of faith (Gal 3:9, Romans 4:13-25). Whenever the New Testament writers talk about faith, they more often than not use Abraham as an example to imitate. However, the remarkable thing about Abraham is not how much faith he had, but who and what he had faith in. We can often view faith as some sort of quality or substance that some people have more than others. I often hear people say, "I wish I had Abraham's faith" as if Abraham had more of this substance called faith than everyone else which enabled him to do risky and incredible things. However, Abraham was not special because he had incredible amounts of faith, but because *of the One he trusted in and who called him*. Faith does not move mountains, but the One whom you have faith in, does. Abraham, like all remarkable people in the Bible, was just another sinful human being like the rest of us. What made his life amazing was that he believed what the Lord God told him. We can see this time and again in the life of Abraham.

Abraham: a Transforming Call

In Genesis 12:1-9 Abraham was called by the Lord God to move home. Leaving everything behind Abraham upped sticks and followed the Lord's call, not even knowing where he was going. In doing this, Abraham shows incredible trust in the Lord God. With no plan and no security, Abraham puts his life, and the life of his family in the hands of the Lord. This happens all the time in the Bible. When the Lord God calls people, they leave everything to follow him. In the New Testament, people often drop what they are doing when Christ calls them to follow him. Fishermen left their boats and nets, and tax collectors left their offices. People would even travel huge distances just to be with him, and frequently forget even to bring food! (Matt 15:32). It is of course the same Lord and Christ who called Abraham four thousand years ago, who called the disciples two thousand years ago, and who calls us today.

What do we learn from this? We learn that the call of Christ is so attractive and so assuring that it drives out all fear and concern for our earthly lives. When people meet with Christ there is something in his countenance, something in his voice, something in the look of his eye that makes us know that deep down we have found the One who loves us and knows us. We might wonder at how someone like Abraham can have such faith, but the real wonder is how wonderful Christ must be to inspire such trust in those he calls.

In fact, it should not surprise us when people abandon everything to follow Christ. What should surprise us more is when someone chooses not to. After all, it is only logical that when the eternal Son of God, who made the heavens and the earth, who loves us beyond measure, and bothers to count the number of hairs on our head, when he calls us, to trust him utterly.

When people don't trust him it is an irrational response, like a child refusing their mother's love and protection, and what the Bible calls *sin*. Sin is nothing more than a refusal to trust in Jesus (John 16:9).

Lot's wife (Abraham's niece) is a stark reminder of someone whose heart was not really in following the Lord. Lot's wife secretly longed for her worldly life, more than she wanted to be with Christ. By looking back as her and her family fled, the Lord saw that her heart was still in Sodom and Gomorrah. And so she did not escape the judgement that fell on those awful cities but was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26).

Abraham: a Transformed Life

Abraham: Trusted in the Resurrection

This simple obedience to the call of Christ transformed the rest of Abraham's life. He believed in what the Lord God told him and built his life upon his promises.

In Genesis 17:1-8, the Lord reminds Abraham that he will one day have a son, and through this child Abraham will become the Father of many nations. At the ripe old age of ninety-nine, and with a wife of ninety, Abraham should be in no doubt that this is an impossibility. Why did God wait until Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of being able to bear children before promising them a child? In order to teach Abraham that the living God is the One who brings life from death. Abraham learnt this about God and so trusted that He could bring a child from the barren womb of his wife Sarah (Romans 4:18-21, Hebrews 11:11-12).

Just as Abraham knew that the Lord God could bring life from the barren womb, he also knew that God could bring back life from the tomb. In Genesis 22 Abraham is called to sacrifice his son, Isaac. It is easy to question both a God that would ask such a thing, and a follower who would carry out such a command. However, if we are careful to read the scriptures we learn that Abraham was convinced that the living God could and would raise his son, Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). After all, how else would God fulfil his promises through Isaac if he were dead?

Abraham is no blind follower of Christ. He understands who Christ is and what he is like. Through his experiences of his own son, Isaac Abraham is given an insight into the life of God the Father, and God the Son. For, as a sacrifice for sin, God himself would one day sacrifice his one and only Son, and three days later resurrect him from the tomb. Abraham was even told that this would happen on the very spot he was told to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:13-14. Mount Moriah is later where Jerusalem would be built, 2 Chron 3:1).