Study Through the Bible

Genesis: Promised Land Living

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Genesis

Why read this book?

If you’re like most people, you’ve wondered about the deep questions of life: Why are we here? What is life all about? Genesis takes you back to the beginning of time to find the answers. It tells about many beginnings: the first plants and animals; the first man and woman; the first sin; the first news of God’s salvation. It also shows God’s dealings with Noah, Abraham and others, demonstrating his desire to fellowship with his people.

Who wrote this book and when?

Moses probably wrote it around 1440 B.C. But since he was not an eyewitness to the creation, he relied on revelation from God and, perhaps, earlier oral or written records.

What period of history does it cover?

From the time of the creation (a date that can only be speculated) to the time when the Israelites arrived in Egypt and grew into a nation (about 1800 B.C.).

Why was it written?

To show that when God made the creation, it was good. But Genesis goes on to say that when sin entered the world, it corrupted the creation, and caused God to initiate his plan for salvation. Genesis provides the framework upon which the rest of the Bible builds.

To whom was it written?

Since this book announces that all peoples on earth will be blessed through Abraham (12:3), it seems fair to conclude that all people can benefit from the account of this patriarch and his descendants.

What to look for in Genesis:

Notice the focus Genesis places on the relationship between God and humanity—broken in the garden and restored through sacrifices and personal encounters with God. Through the stories of history, Genesis illustrates cycles of sin and repentance.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)
A major theme of Genesis is God calling Abram to a new land. Along with that land, God made many promises to Abram and his descendents. Abram’s struggle to believe and realize the promises of God are instructive for God’s people today.

We, like Abram, need to move forward in faith, to enter into all God has promised. We must learn to set aside our planned objectives, approaches to life, and personal desires in order to embrace the greater plan of God. Every one of us needs to leave somewhere or something in order to get closer to God’s purpose. The object of this study is to learn how to follow God wherever he leads.

Scripture:
Genesis 12:1–20

Based on:
"Promised Land Living," Series Builder by John Henry Beukema, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

You may be at a crossroads in your spiritual life, career, or relationships, and there are a number of directions you could go, including doing nothing at all. What does God want?

Abram’s family lived in Ur, a city of progress, trade, culture, and idol worship. Abram’s father Terah worshiped the moon god Nannarah or Sen. The family decided to move 1,000 miles away to Canaan. Instead, they stopped 600 miles from Ur at Haran, which was a center for moon god worship.

After Terah died, big things happened. In Genesis 12:1, “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’” God gave great promises in Genesis 12:2–3, but Abram had to leave to see it happen. He had to leave what was for what would be, resting completely upon the naked promise of God. To Abram’s credit, he goes without question.

His journey took him from the north to the south of the land promised him. Although Abram’s situation was unique, you and I face the same choice.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What crossroads have you faced in your life? Have you ever made a complete and radical change in any way?

- [Q] What is the most difficult change you’ve ever had to make? What made it hard?

- [Q] Have you ever sensed that God was calling you to something radically different than how you were living? What was he calling you to?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God is always calling you toward his purpose.

We all resemble Abram. The call of God swells inside. You feel the longing to follow, to obey, to embrace what he holds out for you in the future. The attraction of home is strong; ordinary is comfortable.

Right now you know what God desires for you. He calls you to trust him, but you are afraid. He calls you to sacrificial giving, but you resist. He calls you to downsize your ambition and supersize your service. He calls you to stop that affair. You know it’s wrong, even when you tell yourself it’s right and normal. He calls you to reach out to that family you know must be hurting. He calls you to something bigger than yourself, something on his agenda, but you are too busy with your agenda. You feel the tug of obedience and catch a glimpse of the promise. Today is the day to go.
Read Genesis 12:10–20. This man who trusted God for the unknown struggled to trust God for daily bread. We can all identify with that. Even worse, Abram intends to be in Egypt long-term. He settled like an immigrant in this foreign country. Approaching the borders of Egypt, he passed his wife off as his sister. The scheme worked at first, but God intervened.

Abram offered no excuses, for he had no defense.

Read Philippians 2:13.

[Q] How does this Scripture, as well as the passage in Genesis, show that God will accomplish what he desires?

[Q] How could Abram trust God enough to leave his home, yet fail to trust God to provide for him? Give an example of how we might do this as well.

[Q] What can we do to avoid falling into fear and unbelief in our journey with God?

**Teaching point two: God is always calling you toward his purpose, and you don't have to disobey to get there.**

There are times you see an escape and take it, not because it’s what God wants, but because it makes sense. Anytime your new tomorrow includes dishonesty, lack of trust, lapse of ethics, or denial of faith, it is not the purpose of God.

This passage in Genesis gives us a warning of how not to follow God as much as how to follow him. We don’t have to wait until we are close to disaster so that God has to intervene on our behalf as he did for Abram.

Columnist Cecil Adams writes in “The Straight Dope” (The Reader’s Guide, 7-18-03) that of the people who have attempted to go over Niagara Falls, only 10 survived. The first was in 1901. Annie Edson Taylor was a plump 63-year-old schoolteacher. Annie used an oak barrel packed with inflated pillows. She was fished out, bruised and shaken but alive. She told onlookers, “No one ought ever do that again.”

Those who followed Annie’s attempt and died should have listened to her warning. We don’t have to learn everything the hard way.

[Q] Looking again at Genesis 12:10–20, what do you think was going through Abram’s mind? Where did his thinking go wrong?

[Q] Why do we so often have to learn things the hard way? Why is it so difficult to take God at his Word?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) When I’m faced with a situation I can’t handle, I look for a way to fix it.
2) When I’m faced with a situation I can’t handle, I give it to God and trust him.
3) When I’m faced with a situation I can’t handle, I pass it on to someone else.
4) When I’m faced with a situation I can’t handle, I panic.
Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which way you react to difficult situations? How can you react as #2?

**Teaching point three: God is full of grace to help us continue toward his purposes.**

There’s a note of grace here. Abram endangered his wife, failed God, and still came out of it with God’s blessing. This doesn’t mean we should live lawlessly, but with confidence in a good God. You may have disobeyed to get to where you thought you should be. God’s purpose is not defeated. We can confess, be forgiven, and walk forward into all he has for us.

Read Romans 7:21–8:14.

**Q** According to this passage, why do I fail even when I want to do the right thing? Does this mean I am doomed to always fail?

**Q** What do verses 8:3–4 tell us about how we are to break this bondage of sin?

**Q** Looking at the rest of the passage, how do we live according to the Spirit?

**Leader’s Note:** God in his grace gives us his Holy Spirit to help us when our best attempts have failed. When we admit our weakness and utter dependence upon God to be able to do good, we have his power to move us ahead. Someone has compared the filling of the Spirit to the way the wind fills the sails of a ship. That mighty power takes us in the direction we should go much more effectively than our feeble attempts to “row.”

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us see that God provides the grace we need to live for him.

**Activity:** Provide each person with paper and pen. Ask them to write down one major sin that plagued them before they came to know Christ. Then ask them to write next to it how that area changed when they came to Christ. Finally, ask them to write how they’ve grown in that area as time has gone on. Use this as an example of how the “wind” of God’s Spirit has been blowing in their lives.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Every one of us needs to leave somewhere to get closer to God’s purpose. Come to Christ; take a risk; do ministry; give sacrificially; turn from sin. Do what he’s calling you to do and rest assured, the Father will never leave your side.

William Frey tells this story in his sermon “When Words Come To an End”:

When I was a younger man, I volunteered to read to a degree student named John who was blind. One day I asked him, “How did you lose your sight?”

“A chemical explosion,” John said, “at the age of 13.”
“How did that make you feel?” I asked.

“Life was over. I felt helpless. I hated God,” John responded. “For the first six months I did nothing to improve my lot in life. I would eat all my meals alone in my room. One day my father entered my room and said, ‘John, winter’s coming and the storm windows need to be up—that’s your job. I want those hung by the time I get back this evening or else!’

“Then he turned, walked out of the room and slammed the door. I got so angry. I thought, Who does he think I am? I’m blind! I was so angry I decided to do it. I felt my way to the garage, found the windows, located the necessary tools, found the ladder, all the while muttering under my breath, ‘I’ll show them. I’ll fall, then they’ll have a blind and paralyzed son!’”

He got those windows up. It wasn’t until later he found out that his father never left his side.

[Q] How does knowing that God’s Spirit is ever present with you give you encouragement in trusting him?

[Q] What area do you need to leave behind to move toward God? Pray for each other in these areas.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
Time to Leave
We must take a spiritual step forward.

A major theme of Genesis is God calling Abram to a new land. Along with that land, God made many promises to Abram and his descendents. Abram’s struggle to believe and realize the promises of God are instructive for God’s people today.

We, like Abram, need to move forward in faith, to enter into all God has promised. We must learn to set aside our planned objectives, approaches to life, and personal desires in order to embrace the greater plan of God. Every one of us needs to leave somewhere or something in order to get closer to God’s purpose. The object of this study is to learn how to follow God wherever he leads.

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PART I

Identify the Current Issue

You may be at a crossroads in your spiritual life, career, or relationships, and there are a number of directions you could go, including doing nothing at all. What does God want?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God is always calling you toward his purpose.

Teaching point two: God is always calling you toward his purpose, and you don’t have to disobey to get there.

With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) When I’m faced with a situation I can’t handle, I look for a way to fix it.
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Teaching point three: God is full of grace to help us continue toward his purposes.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Every one of us needs to leave somewhere to get closer to God’s purpose. Come to Christ; take a risk; do ministry; give sacrificially; turn from sin. Do what he’s calling you to do and rest assured, the Father will never leave your side.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
Godly choices value God’s purpose over personal payoff. The choices we make are the spiritual direction of our lives. The purpose of this study is to encourage us to seek his will for every choice we make. Every day is filled with countless decisions, from the seemingly insignificant to the monumental. When we are faced with a choice, we need to consider God in the equation, for each decision says something about who we are and where we want to go.

Scripture:
Genesis 13:1–18

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter novels, said, “It is our choices...that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” We all make decisions we wish we could take back.


At 3:32 p.m. August 14, 2003, one sagging electrical line near Cleveland, Ohio, connected with a tree branch, beginning a chain of events leading to the great blackout. This single transmission line caused a chain reaction of problems. Cleveland began sucking electricity from Michigan and Ontario...knocking out more transmission lines and generating plants. New York protected their power plants by sealing themselves off from the grid. This created a new problem by having too much electricity, and New York overloaded its own system. It all resulted in the largest blackout in American history.

Small details can end with devastating consequences. How often one small choice results in ruined families, ruined lives. How many times has there been a word, a second, a look, a step, an impulse you wish you could take back? Don’t you want to avoid such mistakes?

Discussion starters:

**[Q]** Name one of the best choices you’ve ever made. What made it such a good choice?

**[Q]** Name a decision you wish you could have changed. Why?

**[Q]** Why are some choices so difficult to make? How do you make choices?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The choices we make are the spiritual direction of our lives.

How do we make proper choices? What should we do? Abram made a great choice—leaving behind the familiar and stepping out into God’s future, followed by a questionable choice—going down to Egypt, then a horrible choice—lying to save his neck and putting his wife in danger.

But God did not give up on Abram, even though he messed up; neither will God abandon us. Hebrews 4:15–16 tells us Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses, and so we can come to him for mercy and grace in our time of need.
Abram got back to where he needed to be. *Bethel* means house of God. *Ai* means heap of ruins. He went from one to the other and in today’s passage lived between the two. He worshiped, gave honor to the God who was still there, even through bad choices.

Lot traveled with Abram, but did not share his vision. Wealth got in the way. As we’ll see in today’s passage, Abram approached the quarrel with peace and maturity.

Read Genesis 13:1–18. Lot chose the best of the possible locations. Logically, it seemed an excellent choice. Geographically, it was a downward journey of some 3,000 feet; morally, it was a much steeper drop (13:13). Lot made a theological choice.

Don’t we often justify the wrong we do? We rationalize a shady deal as good business, a lie as spinning the truth, a moral failure as natural, spiritual coldness as busyness. Lot chose paradise and got hell, as will all who choose not to trust Christ. “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” The ultimate choice is eternal.

God assured Abram that Lot’s choice didn’t change the divine plan. Lot chose for himself, but God chose for Abram.

**Q** What was Lot’s only consideration in making his choice? What does that tell us about what should influence (or not influence) our decisions?

**Q** How did Lot’s choice affect his spiritual life? Give an example of how our choices might affect our spiritual life.

**Q** How did God honor Abram’s generous nature? How does this principle—giving up what seems best—often bring us what we truly want? Can you think of a time this principle worked in your life?

**Teaching point two: Godly choices motivate us to worship.**

Chapter 13 is bracketed by worship services. Abram went God’s way, and it caused him to give glory to God.

Responding to the increasing destructiveness of high winds in the Midwest, one developer in Tulsa, Oklahoma, offered an optional tornado-safe room in the new homes he was selling. Nine of the first ten buyers opted to pay the extra $2,500 for the room—which can also be used as a closet, bathroom, or vault when not needed for safety. The tenth couple…opted for a hot tub instead (“Americans Are Facing More Disasters,” *USA Today*, 5-23-00).

When it comes to luxury, wants over needs, or enjoying life, one size doesn’t fit all, but whatever choice you make before God ought to lead you to a worship experience. Wrong choices decrease your desire to bless God.


**Q** Name all the things in these verses that the Psalmist asks the Lord to do for him. Talk about what each one might look like in practical terms in your life.

**Leader’s Note:** Teach me (v.33), give me understanding (v.34), direct me in the path of your commands (v.35), turn my heart (v.36), turn my eyes (v.37), fulfill your promise (v.38), take away the disgrace I dread (v.39). These things mean we study God’s Word.
pray for understanding, let him lead us in our choices and change our hearts when we’re stuck on the wrong thing, ask for discipline to look away from the worthless things we’re drawn to, and trust him to do as he said he would.

[Q] How do godly choices motivate us to worship?

**Teaching point three: Godly choices put others above yourself.**

Even though you have a choice, that choice is not all about you. Others are affected.

Even Jesus had to pray, “Not my will, but yours.”

Don’t waste much time worrying about fair treatment. Life isn’t fair. No matter how selfish you are, you will still come out on the short end. How much better to choose more selflessly and let God settle the difference.

For example, if you choose to leave your spouse for someone else, that is a selfish choice leading to Sodom. No matter how hard it is for you, put the other above yourself.

Read Philippians 2:3–8.

[Q] How would you define *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*? What practical things can you do to avoid those two things?

[Q] What did it cost Christ to be selfless and live for others? Is any price too great for us?

[Q] What about this passage flies in the face of what we are told continually in our society?

**Leader’s Note:** We are told to look out for number one, to pursue our own happiness, and accomplish our goals at any price.

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To gain perspective on the value of putting others above ourselves.

**Activity:** Ask the group to name any characters in movies or novels that put themselves first. On a whiteboard or poster board, list all the ones they mention. Discuss how they feel about these characters. Then ask them to list characters in movies or novels that put others above themselves. Ask how they feel about these. Who would they rather emulate?

**Teaching point four: Godly choices value God’s purpose over personal payoff.**

Lot turned his back on the promise and reached for what looked best for him. Richard Baxter says in *Leadership*, Vol. 8, no. 3., “Choose that employment or calling in which you may be most serviceable to God. Choose not that in which you may be most rich or honorable in the world; but that in which you may do most good, and best escape sinning.”

Dick Staub in his article “World Christian,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, no. 4, says, “The number one issue with most people when it comes to choosing a career is money. But compared to work that you’ll do well and enjoy doing, money is a rotten standard for making or evaluating career decisions.”
We must have the perspective of faith. For example, you finally meet someone who makes the bells ring and the lights flicker. Is it about how you feel, your status, your security, or do you run the choice through the grid of God’s purpose? Or you are asked to serve in a church ministry. You can have three possible responses: run away screaming as if being chased by a rabid Rottweiler; agree, but feel as if you are being offered a blindfold on the way to execution; enthusiastically agree, adding to a life that feels like juggling chainsaws while riding a unicycle. You cannot make any choice without considering God’s purpose.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

**Q** How do these verses change the way we look at our decisions? According to these verses, what should we take into consideration in our choices?

**Q** How do we “fix our eyes on what is unseen”?

**Q** Which statement best describes these verses:

1) The body doesn’t matter, only the spirit.
2) It’s no big deal when we go through hard times.
3) Life is painful, but we do not lose heart because of our eternal reward.

Explain your answer. What was Paul’s point?

**Leader’s Note:** #1 is false – Paul is not saying the body doesn’t matter, but that we should realize that the body is wasting away. #2 is false – Paul is saying just the opposite. It is a big deal when we go through hard times. That’s why we need an eternal perspective. #3 is true – we can face the pain in life, knowing there is a better life waiting.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Recently, New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof went to Cambodia and tried to buy the freedom of two prostitutes. He selected girls who were there against their will and actually wanted to leave prostitution. Srey Neth cost Kristof $150. He left with the girl and a receipt. The other girl, Srey Mom, was difficult. “After some grumpy negotiation, the owner accepted $203 as the price for Srey Mom’s freedom. But then Srey Mom told me that she had pawned her cell phone and needed $55 to get it back. ‘Forget about your cell phone,’ I said. ‘We’ve got to get out of here.’ Srey Mom started crying. I told her that she had to choose her cell phone or her freedom, and she ran back to her tiny room in the brothel and locked the door. With Srey Mom sobbing and refusing to be freed without her cell phone, the other prostitutes—her closest friends—began pleading with her to be reasonable. Even the owner of the brothel begged her to ‘Grab this chance while you can,’ but Srey Mom hysterically refused to leave.”

She only stopped crying when Kristof agreed to buy back the cell phone and her pawned jewelry, too. Finally Kristof returned her to her family, and it was a joyful reunion. Despite the celebration and tears Kristof worried that the girls would slink back into slavery. A few days later Srey Mom quarreled with her mother and went right back to the brothel. (Nicholas

Why do we choose sinfully when we have the power to do right? Why do we choose what is selfish over what pleases God? Why choose pleasure over service? We must stop, look at our choices, and see the direction of our spiritual lives. “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

[Q] Do we just make one choice to follow God that takes care of us for life? If not, how often must we choose?

Leader’s Note: Although we make the big choice to follow God when we trust Christ as our Savior, we daily must choose to follow him in all our circumstances.

[Q] How can I begin to choose to honor God in all my decisions? Pray for each other in your weak areas.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
Choices Matter

The choices we make are the spiritual direction of our lives.

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PART 1

**Identify the Current Issue**

Small details can end with devastating consequences. How often one small choice results in ruined families, ruined lives. How many times has there been a word, a second, a look, a step, an impulse you wish you could take back? Don’t you want to avoid such mistakes?

PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one:** The choices we make are the spiritual direction of our lives.

**Teaching point two:** Godly choices motivate you to worship.

**Teaching point three:** Godly choices put others above yourself.

**Teaching point four:** Godly choices value God’s purpose over personal payoff.

[Q] Which statement best describes these verses:

1) The body doesn’t matter, only the spirit.
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PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

Why do we choose sinfully when we have the power to do right? Why do we choose what is selfish over what pleases God? Why choose pleasure over service? We must stop, look at our choices, and see the direction of our spiritual lives. “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

——Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
Life is full of circumstances that challenge our faith and threaten our patience in trusting God to keep his Word. Abram’s struggle over a clear promise of God that seems unfulfilled is instructive for believers today. This study will focus on why we must continue to trust God, even when it seems he is silent.

_scripture:
Genesis 15:1–21

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Eric Hulstand reports the action figure “Invisible Jim” is selling briskly in Britain for $3. Here’s the amazing thing: it’s just packaging. There’s no Jim. Invisible Jim is advertised with “lack of darting eyes” and “realistic fake hair,” “as not seen on TV,” and “camouflage suit sold separately.” Have you ever felt like God promised you an Invisible Jim?

A journalist assigned to Jerusalem had an apartment overlooking the Wailing Wall. Every day, she saw an old Jewish man praying vigorously.

And so she went and introduced herself. “You come every day,” she said. “What are you praying for?”

The old man replied, “I have prayed here every day for 25 years. In the morning I pray for world peace and the brotherhood of man. I go home, have a cup of tea, come back, and pray for the eradication of illness and disease from the earth.”

Amazed, the journalist asked, “How does it make you feel to come here every day for 25 years and pray for these things?”

The old man looked at her sadly. “Like I’m talking to a wall.” (Religious Joke of the Day, beliefnet.com, 4-25-03)

Does it sometimes feel like your prayers are hitting the wall? You cry out and nothing improves. You get mad and God doesn’t respond. You put forward your greatest dreams to God and hear nothing. You read a promise in Scripture, but it’s like talking to a wall. That’s where Abram was. What do we do? How do we live? Why should we believe? This text tells us.

Read Genesis 15:1–3. Although Abram had just won a courageous military victory, he was afraid. Is God going to come through? Is God just promising more stuff? Abram wonders how the fulfillment of any promises is possible without the basic building block of a son. Hurrian law (the Hurrians were people of the Near East in the time of Abram) allowed for childless couples to adopt a son to be a substitute heir. This is clearly Plan B for Abram.

Discussion starters:

[Q] Have you ever felt that you were talking to a wall when you prayed? What made you feel that way?

[Q] What do you think might have been going through Abram’s mind in these verses?

[Q] Have you ever tried to help God answer your prayer? What was the result?
PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Life is most difficult when God’s promises seem incompatible with my reality.

Abram does not lose because he questions God; he wins. Author Joyce Baldwin says, “Abram learned the basic lesson every believer has to learn: God’s delays are not denials.”

Read Genesis 15:4–6. God specifies the promise. The great nation will spring from Abram’s own body. What isn’t clear is if Sarai is involved.

Looking at the stars with the one who formed the heavens and the earth, Abram believes and is called righteous. Abram took God at his Word despite the obvious adverse circumstances.

Read Genesis 15:7–8. God offers a covenant as evidence. Every type of sacrificial animal is represented, pointing to the covenant’s significance. Cutting a covenant is a messy, bloody business. The ceremony involved passing between the two piles of parts, indicating death to the one who broke it.

Read Genesis 15:17–18a. God puts his own name on the line. He walks through and puts the curse on himself. God made another bloody sacrifice like that. The Son of God spilled his blood at the cross so all who turn to him would have life. Jesus called it “a new covenant in my blood.”

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). How secure is your salvation? God the Father made the promise in the blood of his Son Jesus. God is faithfully carrying out his grand plan. Even when we do not see it, or when it appears to have been forgotten, he will see it through to the end.

Speaker and author Zig Ziglar tells about the Chinese bamboo tree. “If you decide to add one to your garden, here is what you can expect. Take a seed, plant it, water it, fertilize it for a whole year, and nothing happens. Year two: water, fertilize, and nothing happens. Year three and four, repeat. Year five: water and fertilize, and then sometime during that year the Chinese bamboo tree sprouts, and in six weeks it grows 90 feet.” That is how God’s promise often works. There is nothing; you faithfully hang in and believe, but there is nothing. Then suddenly, in God’s timing, it explodes with life.

[Q] Abram had to believe God even though it went against reason. What about his circumstances made God’s promise seem impossible?

[Q] Have you ever experienced the fulfillment of God’s promise after a long wait? Tell us about it.

[Q] Which statement best describes you:

1) I pray about something once, then leave it in God’s hands.
2) I plead with God daily when faced with trouble. I won’t stop until I get his answer.
3) I pray timidly, not really expecting an answer. I’m surprised when he does.
4) Other
Explain why you chose the statement you did. Is there only one right way to pray? What should be our attitude?

**Leader’s Note:** Different personalities may pray in a different manner. A person’s attitude of trust in God may be more important than how many times he or she prays. Also, a new Christian may be tentatively testing the waters of prayer. Be sensitive to where your group is at and discuss how we can all grow in prayer.

**Teaching point two: God’s greatest promises come with a delay.**

Abram waited 25 years for God to give him a son. The nation of Israel waited centuries for a Messiah. When we wait for God, the wait can be long, but it is more than worth it. What God did for Abram, giving him a miracle son, making him the patriarch of Israel, and most importantly making him the forbear of the Messiah and the father of all who believe, reveals the grace and kindness of God toward those who hold on to the promises.

In his book *Sabbatical Journeys*, Henri Nouwen wrote about his friends who were trapeze artists known as the Flying Roudellas. From them Nouwen learned that a trapeze act has a flyer and a catcher. The flyer is the one who swings high above the ground, lets go of the swing, and flies toward the catcher. The flyer is airborne, high above the crowd, holding nothing. The flyer must wait for the catcher to grab him. One of Henri’s trapeze friends said, “The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.” Instead he must wait and believe the catcher will do his job. Often we must wait even when a situation seems to deny everything we believe about God. Waiting means I must trust that God will come through, that he will catch me.

**[Q]** Read Galatians 3:14. How long did it take for the promise to Abraham to ultimately be fulfilled?

**Leader’s Note:** Until Christ’s coming, this could not be fulfilled. Christ came over two thousand years after Abraham died.

**[Q]** Read 2 Peter 3:9. According to this verse, why does God sometimes act slowly?

**Teaching point three: Keep on believing, because the day is coming when all God’s promises will be fulfilled.**

Maybe as a single person you feel pressure to find that right person. Maybe you’re tired of waiting and are tempted to settle for a relationship you know won’t please God. The promise that God can satisfy your deepest longing feels empty. Or you’re anxious to be sexually active and don’t want to wait. The promise that you will not be tempted beyond your ability to endure sounds ridiculous. Maybe you’re married and you’ve been praying for your husband to change, and you are exhausted after years of frustration, and you doubt God is going to come through. The promise that he hears your prayer and knows what you need before you even ask sounds hollow. Maybe you are experiencing a health crisis. The promise that in your weakness God is strong doesn’t feel true. The promise that he will never leave you is beginning to sound like a joke. The promise that he will be with you even through the valley of the shadow of death feels flimsy.

The one who promised is faithful. No matter how long the delay, he will never fail. Trust him and do not let go. In just the right time the seed will grow beyond your wildest dreams and expectations.
Read Matthew 18:2–4. According to this passage, what should our attitude of trust toward God be? How do we become like children in our attitudes?

Read Mark 9:23–24. How do these verses encourage you when your faith is flagging?

**Leader’s Note:** God honors our desire to believe him, even when we are struggling. Like this man, we need to ask him to help us even to believe.

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us see that God is faithful to his promises.

**Activity:** Ask the group to list any of God’s promises from Scripture. Write these on a whiteboard or poster board. Discuss how God has been faithful to that promise in each individual’s life. Ask if any of these promises will be fulfilled at a later time.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Larry Hoffman went to a Goodwill store in Wisconsin looking for a bargain. He found one. Larry picked out a shirt, paid for it, and took it home. However, when he tried it on, Larry discovered the shirt was too small for him. And then Larry found something else. Stuffed in the pocket of the shirt was a wad of cash totaling $2,000.

Larry immediately contacted the Goodwill store to see if they could identify the original owner. When they couldn’t, Larry turned all $2,000 over to the police, saying, “If there’s a one-tenth of 1 percent chance that somebody’s going to claim it, they should have that opportunity.”

To claim the money, one must be able to describe the shirt and the denominations of the bills. If it is unclaimed after 90 days, the money goes to the city, or Larry can claim it himself. (News reports don’t mention what will happen to the shirt.)

The situations and circumstances God gives us are like that shirt. God’s purpose in giving us a shirt of difficulty or pain is not that it fits, but what’s in the pocket! The shirt God sends us may not be what we want on a human level. It may not fit into our plans, match our needs, or suit our preferences. We may see it as a mistake, a waste, but God intends a far greater blessing.


Can you name any circumstances in your life that looked like a disaster, but turned out to be a blessing?

What circumstances are frustrating you at this moment? How can you trust God with them? Ask others in the group to pray for you.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
A Promise Delayed
God’s greatest promises come with a delay.

Life is full of circumstances that challenge our faith and threaten our patience in trusting God to keep his Word. Abram’s struggle over a clear promise of God that seems unfulfilled is instructive for believers today. This study will focus on why we must continue to trust God, even when it seems he is silent.

Scripture:
Genesis 15:1–21

Based on:
"Promised Land Living," Series Builder by John Henry Beukema, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Genesis 15:1–3. Although Abram had just won a courageous military victory, he was afraid. Is God going to come through? Is God just promising more stuff? Abram wonders how the fulfillment of any promises is possible without the basic building block of a son. Hurrian law (the Hurrians were people of the Near East in the time of Abram) allowed for childless couples to adopt a son to be a substitute heir. This is clearly Plan B for Abram.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Life is most difficult when God’s promises seem incompatible with my reality.

Q Which statement best describes you:

1) I pray about something once, then leave it in God’s hands.

2) I plead with God daily when faced with trouble. I won’t stop until I get his answer.

3) I pray timidly, not really expecting an answer. I’m surprised when he does.

4) Other

Teaching point two: God’s greatest promises come with a delay.

Teaching point three: Keep on believing, because the day is coming when all God’s promises will be fulfilled.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We are most frustrated with God when we don’t understand what he’s doing. However his promises are not unfulfilled, just delayed for a purpose. He understands that purpose, but we do not. That’s why we have to trust him for the day that his plan will be clear.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
The Danger of Easy Solutions
If we grab for easy solutions to our problems, we will miss God’s greatest blessings.

We must struggle through the uncertain misery of today to know God’s greatest blessings. We need to resist chasing our own solutions to the problems of life. There are many ways, good and bad, that we are tempted to deal with difficult circumstances. How God worked in the life of Abram and Hagar shows us that our easy solutions may actually do more harm than good. This study calls us to trust the plan of God.

Scripture:
Genesis 16:1–16

Based on:
"Promised Land Living," Series Builder by John Henry Beukema, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

The Arizona Republic (4-25-95) reported that when Steve Tran of Westminster, California, closed the door on 25 activated bug bombs, he thought he had seen the last of the cockroaches that shared his apartment. When the spray reached the pilot light of the stove, however, it ignited, blasting his screen door across the street, breaking all his windows, and setting his furniture ablaze.

“I really wanted to kill all of them,” he said. “I thought if I used a lot more, it would last longer.” According to the label, just two canisters of the fumigant would have solved Tran’s roach problem.

The blast caused over $10,000 damage to his apartment building. And the cockroaches? Tran reported, “By Sunday, I saw them walking around.”

How many times has the solution you’ve come up with created problems bigger than you had before? Picture the issue that is bothering you. The problem that you say, “If I could just get that over with, things would be great.” Or the relationship that you think, “If this person was out of my life, it would be wonderful.” Or the physical concern that runs through your mind, “If this test would come back clear, life would be carefree.” Whatever the greatest source of stress in your life, be careful about what you do.

Discussion starters:

[Q] If you could wave a magic wand to take care of just one of your problems, what would you change? Can you foresee anything bad happening as a result of that instant solution? Use your imagination.

[Q] Can you think of anything that you thought was an easy solution at the time that turned out to be disastrous? Tell us about it.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Don’t fabricate human remedies when God wants you to trust.

Read Genesis 16:1–6. Ten years before, God promised to make Abram’s descendents as numerous as the stars. But Sarai bore him nothing (16:1). Time was running out for parenthood to be a human possibility. Sarai must have seen herself as the weak link in the chain of God’s promise, and so she reacted with a desperate measure (16:1–2).

Hagar is never called by name and was likely viewed as property. Abram thought, This must be what God had in mind. I’ve waited a decade and that’s long enough. Hagar was the logical solution.
The last detour Abram took from trusting God was still costing him. Hagar was Egyptian, part of the extra “stuff” he got when he left the Promised Land, lied to save his neck, and put his wife in danger. Had he trusted God years before, Hagar would not have been there.

Although Hagar produced a child immediately, this substitute solution created more problems than it solved. Sarai blamed Abram for the mess, and he shirked any responsibility.

Success is not the sign of God’s approval. Just because an easy solution presents itself does not make it God’s will. Every open door is not meant to be entered.

**Q** How do you think Abram and Sarai justified this action? How might we act similarly in our circumstances?

**Leader’s Note:** In that time period, it was common practice for a servant to provide a child if the wife could not. This would not have been considered unfaithfulness to the wife.

**Q** What should have been Abram and Sarai’s attitude toward their infertility in this case? What should our attitude be about God’s unfulfilled promises in our lives? How do we know when we should take some action, and when we should just trust God?

**Teaching point two: Don’t make an escape when God wants you to endure.**

Read Genesis 16:6–16. The story follows Hagar. Now it’s all about her. She headed home to Shur, which was near the Egyptian border. Hagar was a pregnant, runaway slave, with no resources, but God cared for her. The angel of the Lord called her to do the most difficult thing—go back and submit herself to Sarai (16:9). Submission would take humility and may make her miserable, but it was God’s desire.

The definition of repentance is to turn from the wrong direction and go back where you should be. God does not say it will be easier. Using the same word as mistreated, God is saying: She put you down; now you put yourself down. God attached a promise (16:10).

The name Ishmael, meaning God hears, would be a daily reminder that God met her at the point of her misery. Hagar survived a rendezvous with the Almighty and realized the eternal God saw her. Do you know the Creator of all the earth sees you? Cares about you? Loves you? Has plans for you? That is life changing.

The Bible says the one who cares about the sparrows and the flowers cares for you. He loves you with a love that nothing can change. He sees into the deepest places of your heart and knows your needs. With that confidence Hagar returned, knowing God’s promise and presence.

The story stopped with the birth of Ishmael. Abram must have assumed this son was the one God promised. After all, when it comes to starting a family, he was as good as dead. Don’t run from the struggle God intends for your good. Fix your eyes on Jesus, who endured the cross, so you won’t grow weary and lose heart.

We are tempted to try and medicate the pain with food, alcohol, fantasy, work, entertainment, or pornography. We go for the divorce because we are tired, angry, frustrated, bored, or unhappy. We change jobs for bigger money, better benefits, or a brighter future. We change churches because we are irritated, hurt, or neglected. We often quit too soon and find a way out, so the hurt will stop and the aggravation will end. This is a hard word from God. It may
strike you as unfair, unrealistic, and even sadistic. But the same God who let the bodies of Abram and Sarai deteriorate while they waited for a child is the God who loves you. The same God who sent a pregnant slave girl back into a home where she was unwanted and mistreated is the God who sees you. God’s greatest blessings arrive after we struggle through the uncertain misery of today.

[Q] Read James 1:2–4. According to these verses, what might be lost if we are looking only for the quick solution? What can be gained by struggling through difficulties with an attitude of trust in God?

[Q] Read 1 Peter 1:13–15. How can we prepare our minds for action? According to verse 13, where should we place our hope?

Teaching point three: Let God use your circumstances to show you his promises.

Oswald Chambers shares this perspective in his book, So Send I You (Discovery House, 1993), p. 21:

God can never make me wine if I object to the fingers he uses to crush me. If God would only crush me with his own fingers, and say, “Now, my son, I am going to make you broken bread and poured out wine in a particular way, and everyone will know what I am doing.” But when he uses someone who is not a Christian, or someone I particularly dislike, or some set of circumstances which I said I would never submit to, and begins to make these the crushers, I object.

I must never choose the scene of my own martyrdom, nor must I choose the things God will use in order to make me broken bread and poured-out wine. His own Son did not choose. God chose for his Son that he should have a devil in his company for three years. We say, “I want angels; I want people better than myself; I want everything to be significantly from God; otherwise I cannot live the life, or do the thing properly; I always want to be gilt-edged.”

Let God do as he likes. If you are ever going to be wine to drink, you must be crushed. Grapes cannot be drunk; grapes are only wine when they have been crushed. I wonder what kind of coarse finger and thumb God has been using to squeeze you, and you have been like a marble and escaped? You are not ripe yet, and if God had squeezed you, the wine that came out would have been remarkably bitter. Let God go on with his crushing, because it will work his purpose in the end.

You are a grape in God’s hands: easily bruised, fragile, and feeling pressured. When you make up answers or run away from the problem—you are avoiding the efforts of the divine winemaker. God is working to press you into Christ’s image, crushing you to create what is best. Some of you are being crushed, so you will finally turn to Christ in desperation. Others of you know Christ, and this crushing is his refinement of your life. Do not find an alternative to the winepress. Do not play the marble and escape the squeeze. Trust his plan, endure what he calls you to, and the end result will be unparalleled and exquisite.

You are not a marble. You are the fruit of the vine made for his purpose. Make a decision today to endure and trust God at all costs. Say to yourself, I’m going forward on the promise of God. I’m going through the struggle because God’s greatest blessings are on the other side.
Read Romans 5:3–5.

[Q] Try to define each of the qualities mentioned in this passage. What do perseverance, character, and hope look like in our lives?

[Q] Which statement best describes you:
   1) When I’m going through hard times, I don’t believe God loves me.
   2) When I’m going through hard times, I trust that God loves me, even when I don’t feel like it.
   3) When I’m going through hard times, I feel especially close to God.
   4) When I’m going through hard times, I’m tempted to lose faith.

   Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which way you react to hard times?

[Q] How does the fact that God has poured out his love in your heart help you to persevere?
How can you trust that love, even when you don’t feel it?

   **Leader’s Note:** We simply believe God. He told us he loved us and proved it by sending his Son on our behalf. We cling to that knowledge when we cannot feel his love.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Dale Bruner writes in “Is Jesus Inclusive or Exclusive?” *Theology, News, and Notes* [of Fuller Seminary] (October, 1999), p. 3:

The best parable of trust we have in our home is our cat Clement of Alexandria. (He had a companion cat, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, but a local coyote ate the archbishop recently.) When our cat goes outside, he lives in terror. He looks around as though it’s a jungle, and he is terrified. But when he comes in the house, he lies on the floor right between the kitchen and the dining room—where we walk most frequently—and falls asleep in total trust. [My wife] Kathy or I could squash Clement’s head, but he trusts us.

Our cat lives in complete, total confidence in his human companions. (In this connection, I think the best animal synonym for faith is purring.) Every time I see Clement just lying there, I say to myself, that’s what Jesus wants me to do—to trust him. The kind of trust the cat shows in us is the kind of trust the Lord Jesus Christ invites from us.

[Q] How is our relationship with God like this cat’s home? How do we gain this kind of trust?
Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us see the value of endurance.

**Activity:** Ask each person to share what he or she is struggling with currently. After one person shares, ask the rest of the group to pray for him, asking God to give him the grace to endure. Do this with as many as would like to share.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
The Danger of Easy Solutions

*If we grab for easy solutions to our problems, we will miss God’s greatest blessings.*

We must struggle through the uncertain misery of today to know God’s greatest blessings. We need to resist chasing our own solutions to the problems of life. There are many ways, good and bad, that we are tempted to deal with difficult circumstances. How God worked in the life of Abram and Hagar shows us that our easy solutions may actually do more harm than good. This study calls us to trust the plan of God.

**Scripture:**
Genesis 16:1–16

**Based on:**
"Promised Land Living," Series Builder by John Henry Beukema, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

**Identify the Current Issue**

How many times has the solution you've come up with created problems bigger than you had before? Picture the issue that is bothering you. The problem that you say, “If I could just get that over with, things would be great.” Or the relationship that you think, “If this person was out of my life, it would be wonderful.” Or the physical concern that runs through your mind, “If this test would come back clear, life would be carefree.” Whatever the greatest source of stress in your life, be careful about what you do.

PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles**

Teaching point one: Don't fabricate human remedies when God wants you to trust.

Teaching point two: Don’t make an escape when God wants you to endure.

Teaching point three: Let God use your circumstances to show you his promises.

Which statement best describes you:

1) When I’m going through hard times, I don’t believe God loves me.
2) When I’m going through hard times, I trust that God loves me, even when I don’t feel like it.
3) When I’m going through hard times, I feel especially close to God.
4) When I’m going through hard times, I’m tempted to lose faith.

PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

We are tempted to find our own way out of difficulties and circumvent God’s teaching tool in our lives. It takes careful discipline and a willingness to be taught in order to avoid trying to escape a circumstance rather than endure it. But if we are patient and learn all God is trying to teach us, we will see his faithfulness.

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon

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Genesis: Promised Land Living - Study 5

LEADER’S GUIDE

A Piece of the Promise
Those who believe invest in God’s promises.

This study demonstrates how to behave in a way that shows we believe the promises of God by acting on them. The actions Abraham took following the death of Sarah instruct us in how we should view God’s promises. Although there are many things God has said that we may not see come to pass in our lifetime, there are visible, tangible ways we can express our faith that God will ultimately keep his Word to us.

Scripture:
Genesis 23:1–20

Based on:
"Promised Land Living," Series Builder by John Henry Beukema, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Think of a promise you have from God, something you believe God will bring about. That may be heaven, forgiveness for your darkest sins, the comfort of never being alone, the special purpose he has for your life, the salvation of a loved one, an answer to prayer.

What do you do when that promise is unfulfilled after years of waiting? What do you do when something you felt God was committed to do now seems unlikely? When God’s promises are still in the future, what can we do to show that we believe?

God promised Abraham many things, the most remarkable being a son in his old age, and it happened. In the process, he changed his name from Abram to Abraham (father of many), and Sarai’s name to Sarah (princess). But God also promised a land for his people forever, and Abraham didn’t own so much as an acre. He was living in tents and moving from place to place.

Notice how Abraham showed he believed God’s promise, and consider what we can do.

Discussion starters:

[Q] Is there anything that you’ve been praying about for years that seems unanswered? Do you wish to share it with us?

[Q] Can you think of any reason why God has not answered this yet?

Leader’s Note: You may be tempted to give reasons for why God has not answered this person’s prayer. Try to refrain from commenting on that during this discussion time. You may have the opportunity to talk about that later in the study.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our actions can become a statement of faith.

Ronald Reagan was laid to rest in California at sunset on Friday, June 12, 2004. As the sun crept toward the sea, a lone bagpiper walked with the coffin and played “Amazing Grace.” Reagan’s pastor said, “We began this day, and it seemed the heavens were weeping. We have come from sea to shining sea to the soil he loved so much and where his body will remain.”

Genesis 23 opens with a funeral. At age 127, Sarah has died. She died in Hebron, the center of the land of promise. Kiriath Arba was its original name, named after Arba, the greatest man of the Anakites, a scary group of warriors.

Abraham mourned and wept, meaning that in addition to the crying he went through the traditional mourning customs of his day: tearing clothes, cutting his beard, spreading dust on his head, and fasting. This was all done in the presence of the body.

[Q] How did burying Sarah in Canaan show that Abraham believed God’s promise to him?

**Leader’s Note:** Leaving Sarah’s bones in Canaan was a statement of faith. Abraham knew this was the land promised to him. The purpose of this chapter is to show Abraham’s faith in God’s promise. Although he had God’s promise, Abraham didn’t even own a burial plot yet. Abraham requested a plot from the Hittites who owned the land. Because they thought highly of Abraham, he was offered his pick of tombs.

[Q] Read Genesis 23:5–11. Why do you think Abraham insisted on paying for the cave, when the Hittites offered it to him without pay?

**Leader’s Note:** Abraham didn’t want anyone to say, “I made him rich.” But he also wanted an undisputed piece of what God said would be his.

[Q] Read Genesis 23:17–20. Mamre was where Abraham built an altar to God and worshiped. It was where the Lord appeared to him and repeated the promise of a son. Why was this site significant to Abraham? What would it say to his son and grandchildren?

**Teaching point two: Those who believe invest in God’s promises.**

Every believing loved one whose body you put into the ground is a piece of the promise. Each one is a seed of the resurrection; because Jesus lives, they also live. Through your tears of sorrow and loss, take comfort that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. In the pain and heartache of that loss, grab a piece of the promise when you believe the Creator of all knows what he’s doing, and the day is coming when he will wipe every tear from our eyes. You are purchasing a little piece of the promise to come. Take some symbolic action to show you believe.

[Q] Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. What practice in our churches is a tangible expression of our faith? What does it tell our children?

[Q] Read Philemon 22. Paul wrote this to Philemon from prison. How does this simple request show a hope in God? How might the simple fact of getting the room ready have encouraged Philemon and Paul?

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us trust in God’s faithfulness.

**Activity:** Encourage those in the study to trust God for whatever is discouraging them. Perhaps you are single and looking for the right man or the right woman. On good days you believe God has put this desire in your heart and has the right person for you. Buy a symbolic diamond as a visible, tangible expression that you believe it is worth waiting for God’s choice. Maybe you’re looking for a job. As you search and wait, take some symbolic action that shows you believe God will provide that job. Buy a new briefcase or calendar or something that symbolizes a piece of the promise. Maybe you are praying for a loved one. Draw a picture of that person in heaven. None of these are guarantees. We are not promised a mate, a job, or that our loved ones will be in heaven. But these tangible things can energize our prayers and trust in God.
PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If our faith is something that really does not make a big difference, if it is actually not crucial that we or others believe, no wonder it seems boring to some of our young. Anything we don’t care much about can’t be very interesting. The things we do care about, however, we inevitably talk about. ...If faith is real, it seeks expression. It will communicate and profess. It will have the energy of passion. (John F. Kavanaugh in *The Word Encountered*, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, Vol. 40, no. 12)

Q How can you make sure that those around you see the vibrancy of your faith?

Q Which statement best describes you:

1) All those who know me know of my faith in Christ.
2) All those who know me may know that I’m different, but they may not know why.
3) All those who know me would not be able to tell that I’m any different than they are.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. How can #1 become true of you?

—Study by John Henry Beukema, with JoHannah Reardon
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"Those who believe invest in God's promises."

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PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one:** Our actions can become a statement of faith.

**Teaching point two:** Those who believe invest in God’s promises.

PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

If our faith is something that really does not make a big difference, if it is actually not crucial that we or others believe, no wonder it seems boring to some of our young. Anything we don’t care much about can’t be very interesting. The things we do care about, however, we inevitably talk about. ...If faith is real, it seeks expression. It will communicate and profess. It will have the energy of passion. (John F. Kavanaugh in *The Word Encountered. Christianity Today*, Vol. 40, no. 12)

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