Mark Batterson
Pastor and Author of *Wild Goose Chase*

FACING THE UNKNOWN
A Modern Look at the Life of Abraham
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FIVE KEYS TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD YOUR SMALL GROUP
Samantha Kreiger

You’ve been given the awesome privilege and responsibility as a small group leader to lead your group into quality discussion. However, sometimes it’s difficult to know how to craft your time together. Take a deep breath because you’re not alone! Consider these five practical keys when leading your group:

Make Prayer a Priority.
A wise man once said that nothing of eternal significance is accomplished apart from prayer. Since the purpose of your small group time is to invest in eternal things, (your relationship with Christ and with others) then prayer must become a priority and discipline.

During the time you meet, spend no more than 5-10 minutes on prayer requests, and then pray with your group. In doing this, you acknowledge your dependence on Christ. Outside group time, pray for your group on a consistent basis. Pray about their requests, spiritual growth, and that they’d be kept from sin and temptation. The beautiful truth about prayer isn’t so much that it changes things, but that it changes us.

Facilitate an Open Environment for Sharing.
A small group leader is a facilitator. Your leadership is the “launching pad” for creating solid discussion so it’s your job to facilitate an environment that’s conducive for sharing. Your role isn’t to lecture but to engage your group into the discussion by asking open-ended questions. Remember not to rely solely on your discussion guide or curriculum but be prepared to ask your own questions.

Strive to keep the flow of discussion running smoothly, transitioning from one topic to the next. If someone in the group strays from the topic for a long period of time, carefully facilitate him or her back to the original discussion. Becoming an excellent facilitator takes time and practice.

Reveal a Heart of Authenticity.
As leaders, it can be tempting to act like we have it all together or to simply hide our struggles. The truth is if you aren’t real about your sin issues and
struggles, your group will never sense the freedom to expose their weaknesses. Therefore, your group will never know each other beyond what’s on the surface and it’s guaranteed that spiritual growth will be stunted. Communicate consistently that you’re on this spiritual journey together. Be quick to admit your faults or mistakes. When you begin to open up, even if your group may be slow or hesitant in doing so, they’ll know the security is there when they need it. Exposing an authentic heart is key to being an effective facilitator.

Be Sensitive to Time.
Even though time is precious, sometimes we still take advantage of it. When you’re time sensitive, you prove that you’re responsible and care about the outside lives of your group. Setting up time boundaries from the get go is crucial but if this hasn’t been done, it’s never too late to start. Implement answers to questions like: What time will I start and finish each group? Will I start if someone isn’t there or wait for everyone to arrive?

Be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading in your discussion. Ending right on the clock may not always be best in the moment. A few members may need to stay longer so welcome that, but allow for others to leave if they need to. Either way, consider that God is never limited to our little box of time.

Lead with Patience.
Love is patient so when we lead with patience, we lead in love. Sometimes the hardest thing about leading a group is being patient when people can’t make our meeting time. We’ve planned and prepared for them, gotten really excited, and they don’t show up. It’s easy to become frustrated and lose hope, but we must continue to love and focus on who is there.

Practice patience when you ask the group a question. If an awkward silence pervades the air, don’t be quick to answer your own question. Give group members time to think through the question. You’ll be blown away by the discussion that can come from an articulate, well thought through answer!

It’s such a joy to lead others knowing that genuine life-change best happens within the intimate context of a small group. Allow these practical keys to shape how you choose to spend your time together. Rest in the fact that no perfect small group or small group leader exists! Your main strength comes from Christ and what He can do in and through you as you facilitate your group into great discussion.
This discussion guide is a tool to help you combine the video and Bible Study into a dynamic growth experience. As the leader, take some time in advance to consider the Bible Study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

Go online to bluefishtv.com/promo to download logos, posters or flyers to help promote this series to your group.

With that in mind, let’s preview the guide. **When there’s a specific question to ask, it appears in bold type.** Most of the questions are open for discussion, so answers aren’t given. **When we want to whisper directions, we’ll use italics.**

**Intro & Intro to DVD**
Verbalize the Intro and Intro to DVD sections to let the group know about the theme and teaching. Don’t forget the thought-provoking set-up questions to get the most out of the topic.

**Icebreaker**
The Icebreaker can be adjusted to the character of your group, but don’t skip it for several reasons. (1) Every group needs transition time to become comfortable talking about deeper issues. (2) Your group can better get to know each other. (3) The introductory questions draw out practical connections between the topic and their lives.

If your group knows one another well, you obviously don’t need to spend much time on it. But if there’s even one newcomer, these introductions will be very helpful.
Video
Because every group session includes a video portion, think about the logistics in advance. Will everyone be able to see clearly? Make sure to set the audio at a comfortable level before the session. You don’t want your group to miss anything.

Discuss
The discussion time focuses heavily on Scripture. Many times, the scripture discussed comes from scripture mentioned in the video.

Sometimes we ask questions like: What does this verse/word mean? Keep in mind there could be differing opinions. Meaning comes from what the author intended, not from what we read into it. A discussion that involves people bouncing views off one another in an attempt to reach the author’s meaning can be quite productive.

Some of the discussion questions also try to connect the video teaching to your group’s emotions or experience. Is that true in your life? Do you have the same issue?

Challenge
The Challenge section is for your group to apply what they learned. The challenge is optional, but be sure to follow up with your group at the next session to see if and how they applied the challenge.

Further Study
Further Study is suggested homework for individuals to read and reflect on their own. Encourage your group to prepare ahead, but don’t demand it.
Overview

Abraham’s life can be summed up in one word: faith. God asked Abraham to leave everything familiar to him and settle in a strange land. Abraham also waited a very long time for God to fulfill the promise of a son. Even though Abraham and Sarah trusted in God to fulfill his promise, the waiting became difficult and they took matters into their own hands by manipulating their situation. Regardless, God was still in control. God still had plans to bring many descendants through Abraham and Sarah.

When God’s promise was eventually fulfilled through the birth of their son Isaac, Abraham’s faith was tested yet again. Would he obey God and take his son’s life?

Many of us are like Abraham. The pressure of waiting is just too difficult so we begin to have a small view of God in our thoughts: God, will you really do what you promised? But when we wait and trust, taking those small steps of faith, God is able to work in us.

Often times we’re faced with questions like: “Where is God leading me?” or “What am I going to do with my life?” The truth is that God is more concerned about who we are becoming, than where we are going. Are we slowly growing out of our own independence, to dependence on God? Wherever we walk in obedience with God, we can trust his provision is always near.

Because of the incredible faith of our spiritual fathers, that great hope and faith exists for us today!

*Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.* - Romans 4:20
Mark Batterson serves as lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC. One church with multiple locations, National Community Church was recognized as one of the 25 Most Innovative Churches in America by Outreach Magazine.

Mark is the author of the best-selling book, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* and *Wild Goose Chase*, and he’s also a popular blogger at www.markbatterson.com.

Mark lives on Capitol Hill with his wife, Lora, and their three children.
Intro

In the next four weeks, we’re going to talk about faith. By faith in obedience, Abraham took the step to follow God even when he didn’t know where it would lead him. Because of that act, he was able to be faithful in many other areas as God asked. God continued to develop Abraham by showing him that he could fully depend on God. Whatever God calls us to do and promises for us, we can trust his provision is always near.
Icebreaker

Think of your favorite photo. Why is it your favorite? What does it remind you of?
As the leader, consider bringing in a favorite photo of family, wedding, school, vacation, or friend and tell the story behind the happy memory.

What personal photos, videos, or journal entries remind you of God’s faithfulness?
Be ready to share your own memories of God’s faithfulness with family, your spouse, children, loyal friends, job, illness or faith experience.

Intro to DVD

We’re talking today about significant moments in our faith. God called Abraham to move away from his comfortable home and go to an unfamiliar place so that God’s will for his life could be fulfilled. If God asked us to leave everything familiar, could we do it? Let’s watch Session 1 with Mark Batterson.

Video

Play Session 1: God’s Call (12 minutes)
Discuss

Read Genesis 12:1-4 as background and then Hebrews 11:8-12. What did Abraham need in his life in order to “be obedient and go forth”? Why was this so important?

*If you’re in a group setting, consider having someone read Scriptures out loud.*

What kind of city was Abraham waiting for?

What kind of ripple effect did Abraham’s faith have on generations to come?
How were Abraham and his wife able to endure great hardships? How did they “see” the promise?

What does “alien” or “stranger” on the earth mean? In what areas of your life have you felt like a foreigner?
In the video, Mark Batterson talked about hiking the Grand Canyon with his son, Parker. Their hike was extremely difficult but they kept going with the phrase, “no turning back.”

Have you ever faced a difficult task or situation in your own life when you didn’t think you could make it? What kept you going?

Read Proverbs 16:9. How does knowing the Lord is ordering your footsteps affect your life?

How does Abraham’s faith in the unknown impact your life today?
Challenge

Mark Batterson talked about using pictures or objects to remind him of important faith decisions just as Abraham did. Consider surrounding yourself with “altars” that remind you of the spiritual legacy you’ve been given: a photo, Bible, special gift, letter, etc. Allow these reminders to encourage your faith.

Further Study

Read Romans 4:19-22. How do you keep your relationship with God strong when facing the seemingly impossible things in your life?

When have you seen God’s power revealed in your life through a certain circumstance?
Intro

Last week we talked about God’s call and what it required of Abraham. He left everything familiar to him to do God’s work. In worship, Abraham commemorated God’s work by constructing an altar. We can be encouraged by his faith that whatever God calls us to do, he will equip us with what we need.

Did anyone choose some kind of object to remind you of the spiritual legacy you’ve been given? What was the reason behind your choices? How did that impact you this week?
Icebreaker

Name a place you’ve been where you were awestruck by God’s grandeur and your smallness.
As the leader, consider sharing your favorite moment of God’s greatness: Grand Canyon, mountains, birth of a child, a sunset, the ocean.

Where do you feel closest to God? Why?

Intro to DVD

We’re talking today about the greatness of God’s plans. God compares the distance between our thoughts and his thoughts to the expanse of the universe. In Abraham’s mind, God promised the impossible - a son in his old age. If God promised you the “impossible,” could you trust Him? Let’s watch Session 2 with Mark Batterson

Video

Play Session 2: God’s Covenant (10 minutes)
Discuss

Read Genesis 15:1-6. How did Abraham respond when God told him not to be afraid? What emotion do you think you’d express?

*If you’re in a group setting, consider having someone read Scriptures out loud.*

What did Abraham have to do before God “credited it to him as righteousness?” How is that true for us today?

What role should God’s power play in our life when it
comes to our faith?

In the video, Mark Batterson quoted writer, A.W. Tozer concerning how a “low view of God” reduces God to the size of our biggest problem or greatest fear or worst sin. But a “high view of God” is the solution. Read Romans 4:19-22. How does Abraham reveal a “high view” of God?

What does it mean to “not waver through unbelief”?

How does Abraham’s faith encourage you with the seemingly impossible?
What spiritual disciplines can you practice to keep your faith from wavering?

Challenge

Remembering what Mark Batterson said about how we can reduce God to the size of our biggest problem, fear or sin, try writing out some areas in your life where you have a “low view” of God. This week, commit those struggles to God and ask him to help change these specific thoughts.

Further Study

Read Romans 8:22-27. How can this “hope” encourage you when you get up each morning?
Intro

Last week we talked about God’s ways and thoughts being much higher than ours. God promised Sarah and Abraham the “impossible” in their old age. Since God compares the distance between our thoughts and his thoughts to the expanse of the universe, we can trust that His ways are best. We can trust him with anything.

Did anyone think through the Challenge from last time and could you share an area where you’ve had a “low view” of God? Were you able to commit those struggles to God?
Icebreaker

What is something you’ve had to wait a while to have? As the leader, consider sharing when you’ve had to wait on: a spouse, promotion, house, losing weight, large purchase, Christmas present, etc.

What was it like when you finally received it?

Intro to DVD

We’re talking today about God’s timing. Abraham and Sarah were given a specific promise but had to wait years for its fulfillment. Waiting on God’s timing isn’t easy, but the process matures our character and we better appreciate what we’re waiting on. Let’s watch Session 3 with Mark Batterson.

Video

Play Session 3: God’s Timing (11 minutes)
Discuss

Read Genesis 17:15-21. What does verse 18 reveal about Abraham’s plans?
*If you’re in a group setting, consider having someone read Scriptures out loud.*

Did Abraham name his son Isaac or did God name him? Why is this significant?

Why wasn’t Ishmael going to be the son through whom God’s covenant would be established?
How did God handle Abraham’s response?

In the video, Mark Batterson gave several personal examples of “divine delays” in his life. A failed church plant that led to his ministry now; and the unfinished manuscripts that led to better writing later. Do you have a “divine delay” that you’re struggling with in your life right now?

Do you have a “divine delay” that you can look back on and appreciate?
Read Romans 8:22-27. How long has creation been waiting for God to restore what’s been lost?

What are we, as believers, waiting for?

How is “hope” defined here?

How does this passage encourage you in what you’re waiting for?
Challenge

In the video, Mark Batterson mentioned a comforting note about **Genesis 16:13**. Hagar, after being comforted by God, calls Him *El Roi-You are the God who sees me*. Somewhere that is easily visible to you, consider writing the words *El Roi - You are the God who sees me*. When you have anxious thoughts about the future, let this name of God remind you of His sovereignty in your life.

Further Study

Read **Genesis 22:9-14**. What areas in your life aren’t surrendered to God, making it difficult for you to trust his purposes? Why is it difficult to trust God in those areas?

Do you have a special place you can label “The Lord Provided” like Abraham?
Last week we talked about God’s timing. Waiting on Him isn’t always easy, but the process matures our character and we better appreciate what we’re waiting on. Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for God to move. And despite taking matters into their own hands, God still had a divine plan.

Did the name, El Roi - You are the God who sees me, encourage anyone last week? How did that encourage you?
IcebreakeR

Describe a time when you got what you wanted “just in time.”
As the leader, consider sharing a time when you received an encouraging word when you felt low, a parking space, a job, needed money, tickets to a game, etc.

Intro to DVD

We’re talking today about total dependence on God’s provision. Abraham was faced with a decision about Isaac that anyone would dread. Would he obey God and sacrifice his son? If God asked you to surrender your child, what would you do? Let’s watch Session 4 with Mark Batterson.

Video

Play Session 4: God’s Provision (11 minutes)
Discuss

Read Genesis 22:9-14. What was God’s purpose for such a test?
If you’re in a group setting, consider having someone read Scriptures out loud.

In the video, Mark Batterson said that “going to Mount Moriah to sacrifice the son God had given him made no sense to Abraham. He had to be totally disoriented.” How could Abraham have felt “disoriented” by the Lord’s command?

Have you ever felt disoriented by God’s leading in your life? How?
How do you think Abraham’s faith was increased when the Lord intervened?

Read Hebrews 11:17-19. Why did Abraham reason that God could raise the dead?

If God were to provide too much for you too soon, how could this possibly short-circuit your spiritual development?
Challenge

Consider choosing a verse out of Hebrews 11 that begins with “by faith…” Insert your name after “by faith” and write your own sentence on an index card. Also write something you’ve done by faith in the past or would like to in the future. Keep the card in the pages of your Bible.

Further Study

Finish reading Hebrews 11. Which patriarch’s story in Hebrews 11 seems the most “real” or relatable to you today?

How do you want your faith to impact others when your life on earth is over?
I believe that small groups can be an instrumental part in deepening our relationship with God and with others. My family has formed our deepest and most inspirational relationships within our small group as we meet and pray together. But there’s more to a small group than just gathering together every 1 or 2 weeks.

We have to learn how to get off the couch.

For over 20 years Bluefish TV has been creating video resources that are used in small groups because our ministry believes strongly that there’s a time and place for gathering together for prayer and study. But we also believe that small groups should be a place where we stand shoulder to shoulder and serve others in the name of Christ.

If you are looking for opportunities where you or your group can put your faith into action, search our ministry website rightnow.org. We have posted thousands of local and international service opportunities and we have a team of coaches who are available to provide further help.

Take the step — any step — towards getting off the couch and making a difference in the world around you.

Brian Mosley
Sr. Producer – Bluefish TV
Director – The RightNow Campaign
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