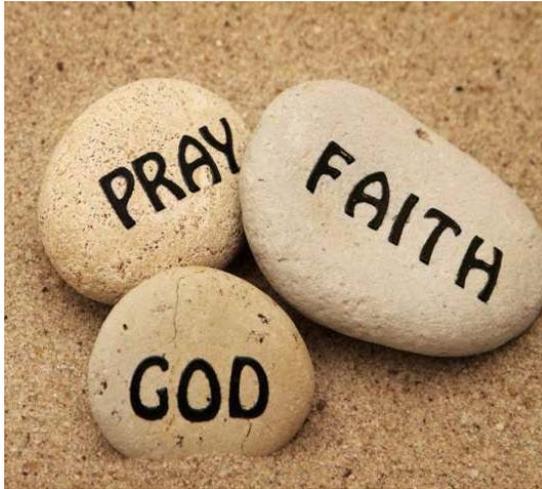


SEP 20 2020 ... START HERE ...



Prepare for our time together from afar

- Find a quiet and comfortable space
- Turn on some soothing instrumental music, maybe with headphones
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle
- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

TIME FOR THE ANCIENT STORY

Read silently or aloud – let these ancient words tap into your imagination.

After these events, the LORD's word came to Abram in a vision, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your protector. Your reward will be very great."

But Abram said, "LORD God, what can you possibly give me, since I still have no children? The head of my household is Eliezer, a man from Damascus." He continued, "Since you haven't given me any children, the head of my household will be my heir."

The LORD's word came immediately to him, "This man will not be your heir. Your heir will definitely be your very own biological child." Then he brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have." Abram trusted the LORD, and the LORD recognized Abram's high moral character.

- Genesis 15:1-6 CEB

SO WHAT NOW?

Read silently or aloud – some thoughts on this story

I teach math at a high school. I teach Algebra 1 to 9th graders mostly. Just a few weeks before school was to start as a hybrid plan to protect everyone from COVID, the state's infection numbers spiked bad and we learned that school would open 100% online.

My students were to have transitioned to high school with all the “stuff” that their freshman year sets up – all the assemblies, football games, volleyball matches, getting used to being more grown up, the dances, the spirit weeks – you get the picture.

And now? Now my students come to class behind a letter in a Google Meet.

We do the best we can – with internet outages and software crashes and systems not cooperating with each other – all while trying to learn and communicate and build relationships and turn in and grade assignments. This school year is not cool and it isn't our fault. It isn't our fault that COVID appeared. It isn't our fault that COVID is a nasty nasty virus. It isn't our fault that decisions are made that make our lives incredibly difficult.

Same thing happened to Abram back in the day.

Today we are jumping a huge jump – from the first humans realizing the huge decision they made to eat the fruit of the tree God told them not to, all the way to years later where we see Abram and Sarai and Lot and a bunch of kings get into a hot mess.

There was a famine, and there were some painful family break ups (Abram and Lot), and there were some awesome blessings as Abram gained a lot of material wealth but apparently didn't get a big head with it. And if Abram complained, it isn't written here.

Then right before our story, a bunch of kings get into a fight and took Lot and all that Lot had. That's what kings in fights did back then – and still do today in some parts of the world. So Abram finds out, and takes off to rescue Lot. He does, and the kings stop fighting – not really at peace but at least not fighting – and it seems all is well.

Not fun.

Then God shows up in a vision – that's our story today. God shows up and tells Abram not to fear because God is Abram's protector.

And Abram cries out to God – but I don't have a son! Without a son to leave all my stuff to, what am I supposed to do? My stuff has to go to my biological son!

Let me stop for a sec. See, in Abram's culture and timeframe – way back thousands of years ago and in the Middle East – that was THE thing for a guy. You built up your wealth, your farm, your whatever and you gave it to your first-born son. That was the tradition. That was the way. It seemed every guy did it because that's the way it had always been.

And Abram is getting older and Sarai has not had any children, for whatever reason. We don't get to hear from Sarai on how she feels about the whole thing – because back then your worth as a woman was wrapped up in having that firstborn son for your husband.

And people didn't live forever back then ...

So Abram cries out. And God stops him and challenges Abram. "Count the stars, if you can ... that's how many kiddos and grandkids and great grandkids you're going to have. Your biological son will inherit everything you have."

Whoa. I can imagine God chuckling ... Count the stars ... if you can. Because that's how many descendants ... It's not like if Abram counted 1276 stars that night that God would make Abram have 1276 descendants – it's more of an idea that Abram can't count them all!

But God! You know Sarai hasn't been able to get pregnant! You know we are getting older, almost past the age of having kids! You know this is a terrible harsh world filled with war and kings who take people and not enough to eat with famines and ... God! Are you for reals?

The story doesn't reveal whether Abram thought these things. I bet he did. And I bet Sarai did too. What kind of God makes promises like that? So off the chart amazing that they can't possibly be true?

The same God that said – do not fear.

So ... maybe after a time, we don't really know ... Abram trusts God. And God knows that Abram is honestly trusting ... so it's all good.

But ... we aren't promised a biological son to meet a culture's expectation. What **are** we promised?

In the Psalms and in other places in the Hebrew Scriptures (the first part of the Bible) and especially in the Gospels, God makes it clear what we are promised – presence. Grace. Mercy. Protection. Love.

We are promised that no matter what happens with COVID – God is with us.

We are promised that no matter what happens in our families – God gives us grace.

We are promised that no matter how hard online or hybrid school may be – God gives us mercy.

We are promised that no matter how hard our day to day lives might be – God gives us protection.

And above all – no matter what – we are promised that God gives us love.

My question for you is – will we trust? *Really* trust these promises? Because they might not turn out the way *we* want them to. God doesn't always work in ways we expect and God certainly doesn't take orders from us. Will we trust that God will keep these promises even if we think it isn't happening?

God is still with us even if we honestly say no – we can't trust. Because life has been too painful, too hard, too awful. God gets it. And God is still here. So – even if we can't trust, God keeps those promises. For real. Whether we trust or not. And that's pretty awesome, if you ask me.

CHAT WITH GOD TIME

Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper.

Let your voice speak loud and clear, O God
May Your visions comfort our weary eyes

As You once came to Abram despite his doubt
Come to us in our uncertain future too

Point us toward the twinkling night lights above
Hold our tear-stained faces and shattered hearts

As You once gave Abram words of courage
Remind us of Your safety that we may not fear

Guide us from traditions and false promises
Defend us as we learn to defiantly trust You

LET YOUR SOUL RESPOND

As you wish, choose a theme and participate in a response to the story and the message.



CREATION

Practice awareness

- Head outside at night when the stars are out
- Take a few minutes and let your eyes take in the view

What other parts of creation are like the stars?



FAMILY

Practice reflection

- What are your family relationships like?
- Who are your chosen family members?

What defines a family for you?



TRUST

Practice wisdom

- What does it take for you to trust someone?
- How do you build or lose trust?

What does trusting God look like for you?

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR MIND RESPOND

Choose a “thought & question” pair to think about. You can do one or as many as you’d like.

1. God promises to protect Abraham. *How do you think God is protecting us with all the challenges we face today?*
2. Abraham is upset because he doesn’t have a son – to pass on all that Abraham has to. *What family traditions have been passed down to you? What traditions do you want to keep and which do you want to let go of?*
3. Abraham chooses to trust God and God saw that Abraham was a good man. *What makes it hard for us to trust God? What does it take to be a good human being?*

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
 - choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
 - write something that reflects your thoughts
 - what else can you imagine?
-

LET YOUR BODY RESPOND

What will you do with this experience?

Choose an action (or more) to act on what you've learned ...

- Research a constellation. Share a Tik-Tok video on what you learn.
- Set up the camera on your phone to capture a picture of the Milky Way.
- Start a family tree. Include close family friends. Give thanks for your loved ones.
- Write a letter to an ancestor describing how their traditions make you feel.
- Say a prayer to God – telling God about what you need to trust.

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

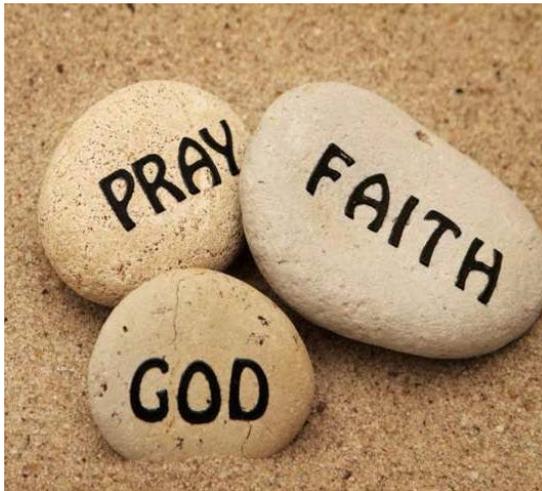
- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
 - choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
 - write something that reflects your thoughts
 - what else can you imagine?
-

END HERE ...



Prepare for our return to our daily lives

- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK! PASTOR CRISTINE

ONLINE RESPONSE OPTIONS

How will you share this experience with our youth group?

If you would like to share your responses online with our youth and leaders, make sure you are part of our MVCC Youth Google Group.

Email Pastor Cristine at youth@montevista.org for more information.