

CHAPTER 2, GOD BUILDS A NATION

TIMELESS TRUTH: WHAT SIN CHANGES, FAITH OVERCOMES.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

“I will.” These are words of covenant commitment and promise spoken by a sovereign God to Abraham. God’s master plan to restore us to Himself gets a fresh start with these words. God is determined to fulfill His promise in spite of the frailties and failures of His people. God chooses to create a new nation through Abraham, revealing Himself to and working through this new community of faith. God promises Abraham saying “I will...”

- make your descendants into a great nation
- give this nation a land in which to dwell
- bless all other nations through the nation of Israel

And two thousand years later God’s Son was born, a descendant of Abraham, thus fulfilling the covenant promise.

This chapter demonstrates a striking duality: God using broken people to fulfill His unbreakable promises. But on a day-to-day basis, God’s people continue to make bad choices that expose their ever-present sin nature. Abraham and Sarah, waiting for years for the child God promised, opt for a workaround to conceive an heir through Sarah’s servant, Hagar. Isaac and Rebekah raise a very dysfunctional family. Jacob perfects the “workaround method” by conniving and cheating his way through life.

But what sin changes, faith overcomes. In spite of their failures, God’s people respond in faith. Abraham picks up stakes and travels to a foreign land just because God said to. He gives his relative Lot the choice real estate, having faith God would still bless him. Abraham and Sarah, through laughter and tears, finally see God fulfill his promise through the birth of a son, Isaac. In a dramatic episode, Abraham shows he is willing to go so far as sacrificing his only son, Isaac, just because he trusts God. This foreshadows the willingness of God to do the same to his own Son. The key verse of the chapter is: *“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”* Therein lays the Gospel itself.

His family continues to demonstrate faith. By faith, Isaac finds a wife for his son. Jacob comes to faith after literally wrestling with God. By faith, Esau also shows Jacob grace and forgiveness. With every story, we are reminded that God works through flawed people who take steps of faith.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: Share a time when someone important in your life made a promise to you and kept it. Was there a time when someone failed to keep a promise? What was the result?

1. Chapter 2 of God's story opens with God calling Abram to make the sacrifice of leaving a comfortable life: homeland, friends, family and steady income. Describe an experience when God has called you to do something similar. What was required of you to obey His instructions? What were the results?
2. God chose Abraham and his descendants to represent Him to others who did not yet know God. What parallels can you draw between Israel and the Church?
3. Consider God's interaction with each character in chapter 2 of *The Story*. What patterns can you identify? What do these patterns reveal about the character of God?
4. Abraham serves as the example of justification by faith. Faith could be described as "trust in action based on God's revelation." Identify acts which demonstrate Abraham's faith. What demonstrations of faith can you identify in your own life?
5. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for God to fulfill His promise of a child. Have you waited for a long period of time for God to act in a given situation? Are you waiting on something now? (Share the circumstance only if you are comfortable.) How might this example serve to encourage you? How can the group best pray for you?
6. Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant, was treated harshly by Sarah, causing her to flee on two different occasions. What do you learn about God from observing His interactions with her?
7. In Abraham's culture, a name said a lot about someone's character. God makes his relationship with Abram and Sarai official by making a covenant with them and changing their names to Abraham and Sarah. How has your character changed since your relationship with God began?
8. Jacob said to Esau, "*For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably*" (p. 24). By showing grace to Jacob, Esau demonstrated God's gracious character. To whom do you need to show grace?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 3, JOSEPH: FROM SLAVE TO DEPUTY PHARAOH

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. Compare the sin of Adam and Eve with the sin of Joseph. Then compare the sin of Joseph's brothers with that of Cain. What similarities do you discover? What similarities do you see to the sin in your own life? How can the pattern be broken?
2. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, his boss' wife, and his friends in prison. Instead of becoming bitter, he trusted God. How can you avoid becoming bitter when you are betrayed?
3. What character traits do you see in Joseph that made Potiphar trust him (p. 31)? How might your boss describe your character? What is a trait Joseph had that you can improve on this week?

DAY 2

1. How was Joseph able to resist the sexual temptations of Potiphar's wife (p. 31)? What can you do to protect yourself from sexual sin?
2. Twenty years after his brothers sold him into slavery, they came to Joseph to buy grain. How does Joseph's story serve as an example to you of forgiveness, trust, and restoration? What is the hardest thing you have ever had to forgive? Be forgiven for?
3. Looking back on his life, Joseph said that what others intended for evil, God intended for good. When has an evil done to you turned out for good? How can you use this to help you in the future? What does this reveal about God?

DAY 3

1. Joseph's brothers had been lying about his disappearance for 20 years and were afraid of how he might react, especially after their father's death. They told Joseph a made-up story saying that Jacob had asked them to request that Joseph not harm them. They were having trouble forgiving themselves. Is there a mistake you have made where you've found it difficult to forgive yourself?
2. Reflect upon the first three chapters of The Story. What family cycles emerge? What life lessons can you apply to your own life from observing these cycles?