SELAH

A Family to Bless the Nations
Five Mornings in Genesis 20 and 21

Ten minutes. Monday through Friday.

Have a notebook nearby, or open the notes app on your phone. You will write something every day.

MONDAY	GOD'S FAMILY IS KEPT
TUESDAY	GOD'S FAMILY IS STILL USED
WEDNESDAY	GOD'S FAMILY IS REMEMBERED
THURSDAY	GOD'S FAMILY IS GIVEN SIGHT
FRIDAY	GOD'S FAMILY IS SENT

NW Hills
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

MONDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS KEPT.

STOP

This is the first of five mornings we are going to spend in the same two chapters we opened on Sunday.

Before anything else, stop. The phone can wait a few minutes. The list you already started writing in your head can wait too. Nothing in the next ten minutes is going to fall apart without you.

You are allowed to be still. Take a minute before you answer anything below.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down.

EXHALE

Pay attention to your breathing for a moment.

God formed the first human out of dust and then breathed life into him. You did not ask for the breath you just took, and you will not have to remember to take the next one.

Breathe slowly. Let your shoulders drop.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out.

> *As you inhale, pray, "You keep what I cannot keep..."*
> *As you exhale, pray, "...hold me close today."*

LOOK

Scripture is where God tells the truth about himself and about us, and he leaves the uncomfortable parts in.

This morning's verses are a conversation God has in the middle of the night with a man who is not part of the promise at all.

Read through them slowly two times before you move on.

> *But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."*
>
> *Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."*
>
> *Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her."*
>
> Genesis 20:3-6 NIV

A S K

God stepped in to protect a man who never asked for protection, and to protect a promise that Abraham was busy putting at risk.

Abraham had done everything wrong here. God kept the promise anyway.

Where in your life are you aware that God has been holding something together that you were not holding?

Is it easier for you to believe that God is disappointed in you, or that God is keeping you? Which one do you actually live like?

What would change about today if you believed God is holding your life the way he held that promise?

In your journal, write a short prayer thanking God for something he has kept that you could not have kept yourself.

Or, if you are not sure God has been holding anything, write a prayer asking him to show you one place where he has been at work without you noticing.

H E A R

This last part is the strangest one, and it is the shortest. You stop talking and you listen.

The temptation on a first morning is to finish the page and get on with the day. Resist that for two minutes.

You do not have to fill the silence. Just sit in it.

If it helps, start with this: “I'm listening for you, God. Speak to me.”

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

TUESDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS STILL USED.

STOP

A day has gone by since you last sat down with this. Some of it was probably good and some of it probably was not.

Whatever happened yesterday, you do not have to clean yourself up before you begin. Come in as you actually are.

Take a minute to be still before you answer anything below.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down.

EXHALE

Slow your breathing down again.

You are not trying to achieve anything with this. Slowing your body down is simply one of the easiest ways to slow your mind down.

Let each breath out be longer than the breath in.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out.

> *As you inhale, pray, "You have not set me aside..."*
> *As you exhale, pray, "...use me again today."*

LOOK

One of the reasons to trust these Scriptures is that nobody edited out the embarrassing parts.

Yesterday you read about Abraham putting his wife and a whole town in danger. Today you read what happened afterward.

Read through these two verses slowly two times before you move on.

> *Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again,*
>
> *for the LORD had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah.*
>
> Genesis 20:17-18 NIV

A S K

God used Abraham to bring healing to the very town Abraham had endangered.

Abraham did not earn that. He was not restored because he had proven himself. He prayed, and God healed people through him anyway.

Is there a part of your past you assume has disqualified you from being useful to God?

Who might God want to bless through you, precisely in the area where you feel least qualified?

What is the difference between being forgiven and being made useful again? Have you experienced both?

In your journal, write a prayer asking God to use you this week in the place where you feel most unqualified.

Or, if you are struggling to believe you are forgiven at all, write a prayer asking God to make his mercy real to you today.

H E A R

Most people go their whole lives without hearing an audible voice from God. That does not mean he is not speaking.

So do not sit here waiting for something dramatic. Listen for the ordinary thought that will not leave you alone.

Two minutes. Not talking. Not planning. Listening.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down in your journal.

WEDNESDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS REMEMBERED.

STOP

You are halfway through the week now. This is usually the morning it stops feeling new.

That is normal. Show up anyway. The value of this is not in how it feels.

Set the phone somewhere you cannot see it and take a minute to be still.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down.

EXHALE

Breathe slowly again for a moment.

Nothing about the breath you just took was earned. It was given to you before you thought about it.

Let that be the shape of the next two minutes.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out.

> *As you inhale, pray, "You have not forgotten me..."*
> *As you exhale, pray, "...you are never late."*

LOOK

Some of the most enormous sentences in the Bible are also the quietest.

This morning's verses report the moment twenty-five years of waiting finally ended, and they report it almost casually.

Read them slowly two times, and notice how many different ways the writer says that God did what he said he would do.

> *Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.*
>
> *Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.*
>
> *Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.*
>
> Genesis 21:1-3 NIV

A S K

God did what he said he would do, at the exact time he said he would do it.

It took twenty-five years. During most of those years, nothing visible was happening.

Yesterday you read about God opening wombs in Gerar after Abraham prayed. Today Sarah conceives. Those two sit side by side in your Bible, and it can sound like a formula. It is not one. God set this date back in chapter 17, before Abraham ever opened his mouth.

What are you currently waiting on? How long has it been?

The text says God acted “at the very time” he had promised. What does it do to you to think that a date may already be set that you cannot see?

Sarah's first response was laughter that she wanted other people to share. When something good happens to you, who do you hand it to?

If you are waiting this morning, your waiting is not a verdict on your faith. You may not get the outcome Sarah did. But God has not abandoned you in your waiting, and he loves you deeply.

In your journal, write a prayer about the thing you are waiting on, and be honest about how long it has been.

Or, if the waiting has worn you down to the point that you no longer want to ask, write that down instead. God can work with that.

H E A R

Your mind is going to wander in the next two minutes. That is not a failure of the exercise.

When you notice it has drifted, do not scold yourself. Just come back.

Sit still and let God have the last word instead of you.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down in your journal.

THURSDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS GIVEN SIGHT.

STOP

By the fourth morning you may have the rhythm of this down, which is good and also a little dangerous.

Anything can become a routine you move through without paying attention. So be intentional this morning.

Take a full minute of quiet before you answer anything below. Longer than you think you need.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down.

EXHALE

Breathe in slowly, and out slowly.

You have done this three mornings in a row now. Let your body settle faster than it did on Monday.

Do not rush past this part to get to the reading.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out.

> *As you inhale, pray, "Open my eyes, Lord..."*
> *As you exhale, pray, "...let me see what is there."*

LOOK

This morning's passage is not about the chosen family at all. It is about a woman that family threw out.

Hagar is alone in a desert with a dying son and no water left, and she has given up looking.

Read these three verses slowly two times before you move on.

> *God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.*
>
> *Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."*
>
> *Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.*
>
> Genesis 21:17-19 NIV

A S K

The well was already there. Hagar could not see it, and God had to open her eyes before she could.

On Monday you read about God protecting an outsider that Abraham had written off. Today an outsider is the only person in the story who ends up seeing clearly.

Where have you decided in advance what you were going to find in a person, and stopped actually looking at them?

Is there something in your life right now that you are describing as an empty desert? What would it mean if there were water in it that you cannot see yet?

Who is somebody you have quietly written off? What is one thing you could do this week to look at them again?

In your journal, name that person by name and write a prayer asking God to open your eyes about them.

Or, if you are the one in the desert this morning, write a prayer asking God to show you what is already there.

H E A R

Some people cannot be quiet before God because they assume he is annoyed with them.

That is not what these chapters show. He goes into deserts after people. He hears a boy crying under a bush.

He is not tired of you. Sit still for two minutes and let that be true.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down in your journal.

FRIDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS SENT.

STOP

This is the last of the five mornings. Before you start, think back over the week and what has come up in these few minutes each day.

Whatever you have written down this week, do not leave it on the page. Today is about carrying it out the door.

Take a minute to be still before you answer anything below.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down.

EXHALE

Breathe slowly one more time.

You will not always have ten quiet minutes and a page in front of you. You will always have your breath.

This is something you can do in a car, in a waiting room, or before a hard conversation.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out.

As you inhale, pray, "Send me out today, Lord..."
As you exhale, pray, "...make me a blessing."

LOOK

The last thing that happens in these two chapters is that somebody outside the family notices what God is doing inside it.

A foreign king walks into Abraham's camp with the commander of his army and says a sentence Abraham never says about himself.

Read these two verses slowly two times before you move on.

> *At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do.*
>
> *Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you."*
>
> Genesis 21:22-23 NIV

A S K

The people outside the family could see what God was doing before the family could.

That is the whole point of this family. God told Abraham that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him.

If somebody outside the church watched your life this week without you explaining it, what would they conclude about God?

The chapter ends with Abraham planting a tree in dry ground whose shade he will likely never enjoy. What is something you could start this year that somebody else will benefit from instead of you?

Name one person outside this church you will do something for in the next seven days, with nothing expected in return.

In your journal, write that person's name and what you are going to do, and write a short prayer asking God to go with you.

Or, if you cannot think of anyone, write a prayer asking God to put someone in front of you this week and to help you notice.

H E A R

You may want a clear assignment this morning. You may not get one, and that is all right.

Being sent usually looks less like an announcement and more like a name you cannot stop thinking about.

Sit still for two minutes and pay attention to who comes to mind.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down in your journal.