SELAH

Gathered

A Family to Bless the Nations
Genesis 25:1–18

THIS WEEK

MONDAY
GOD'S FAMILY IS GATHERED

TUESDAY
GOD'S FAMILY IS COUNTED

WEDNESDAY
GOD'S FAMILY IS SEEN

THURSDAY
GOD'S FAMILY IS BROUGHT BACK

FRIDAY
GOD'S FAMILY IS WELCOMED HOME

Five days. Each one takes about fifteen minutes. You will be asked to write things down. A notebook works, and so does the notes app on your phone. Use whichever one you will actually open.

NWHills
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

MONDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS GATHERED.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

This is the week after the last Sunday of a series we started back in June. Twelve weeks on one family. It is finished now, and the finishing is worth sitting with. There is nothing you are missing by stopping for a few minutes. The day will still be there. Let it wait.

- 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.

EXHALE

Start by noticing that you are breathing and that you did not have to arrange it. Your lungs have been doing this all night without asking you. Slow it down on purpose for 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, letting the count steady your pace.

As you inhale, pray, "You are the God who gathers…"
As you exhale, pray, "…keep me with your people."

LOOK

These two verses are an obituary. Genesis has spent thirteen chapters on this man and it buries him in one sentence. What it chooses to say in that sentence is the whole point, so read it slowly enough to hear what is actually there.

Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

Genesis 25:7–8 NIV

ASK

> This is a death text, and some of you are reading it with somebody specific in mind. If that is you, you do not have to hurry past it this morning. Grief is welcome in this space. Genesis does not explain what happens next and neither will this page. It only tells you that God did not lose him.

- Genesis says two separate things here. Abraham was buried, and Abraham was gathered. What is the difference between those two?
- "Gathered to his people" is plural. Who do you think Genesis has in mind?
- God had promised Abraham a good old age sixty years earlier, in the dark, when he had no children. Where are you currently waiting on something God said a long time ago?

Write a short prayer thanking God that being gathered is something he does, not something you accomplish.

Or, if the idea of being gathered feels far away this morning, write a prayer asking him to show you one person he has already gathered you to.

HEAR

Silence is strange at first, and most of us fill it within about four seconds. Resist that. You are not listening for a voice in the room. You are giving God the last word instead of yourself.

Sit for two minutes. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.

TUESDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS COUNTED.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

A lot has happened since this time yesterday, and most of it did not feel significant. That is normal. Take a minute before you start and let the noise settle rather than trying to push it away.

- 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.

EXHALE

You do not have to make anything happen in the next few minutes. Breathe slowly and let your body understand that nothing is required of it right now.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

As you inhale, pray, "Lord, you know my name…"
As you exhale, pray, "…you have not lost count."

LOOK

What follows is a list, and lists are the easiest thing in the Bible to skim. Do not skim it. These are the sons of Ishmael, the boy who did not get the covenant. Read every name out loud, slowly, twice. The reading is the exercise today.

Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps.

Genesis 25:13–16 NIV

ASK

> Years before this, God told Abraham that Ishmael would father twelve rulers. Here Genesis counts out twelve and names every one. Being outside the covenant line did not mean being outside God's attention. Being chosen was never about being loved more.

- Genesis could have written "and Ishmael had twelve sons." Why do you think it names them instead?
- Is there a part of your life you assume God is not really tracking? What is it?
- Where have you watched something good land on somebody else and quietly concluded there was not any left for you?

Write a prayer asking God to help you believe he keeps a count of things nobody else is counting.

Or, if you are the one who feels overlooked this morning, write your own name down and ask him to show you that he already knows it.

HEAR

You may catch yourself trying to produce a thought so the silence feels productive. You do not have to. Nothing here has to be finished.

Sit for two minutes. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.

WEDNESDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS SEEN.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Midweek. You are far enough in that this can start to feel like a task to complete, which is exactly when it stops working. Come to this on purpose today rather than out of habit.

- 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.

EXHALE

Breathing is the one thing your body does that you can either leave alone or take over. Take it over for two minutes and give the whole thing your attention.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

As you inhale, pray, "The God who sees me…"
As you exhale, pray, "…is here in this place."

LOOK

Hagar is a slave. She is pregnant, she has run into the desert, and she is alone. God finds her out there, and she does something nobody else in the whole Old Testament does. Other people name altars. Other people name places. Read what she names.

Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

Genesis 16:13–14 NIV

ASK

> What was done to Hagar was wrong, and God does not pretend otherwise. Being seen by God is not the same as being told to stay put and endure. If you are in something that is hurting you right now, being seen includes being seen by the people God has put around you. Tell one of them this week.

- Hagar names God out of the worst week of her life. What does it tell you about her that this is the name she chooses?
- Genesis 25:11 says that after Abraham died, Isaac settled at this well. The son they kept made his home at the well of the woman they threw out. What do you make of that?
- Where do you most need to be seen right now, and who have you told?

Write a one-sentence prayer using Hagar's name for God. You are the God who sees me.

Or, if you are not sure you believe he sees you, write that down honestly and ask him to prove you wrong.

HEAR

Do not expect an audible voice. Expect that your mind will wander, and when it does, come back without scolding yourself for it.

Sit for two minutes. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.

THURSDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS BROUGHT BACK.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

By day four this can become a rut you settle into without taking it seriously. Be intentional this morning. Read slower than you want to.

- 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.

EXHALE

Two minutes is a long time when you are not doing anything with it. Let it be long. Nothing about the next two minutes has to be useful.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

As you inhale, pray, "Nothing is too far for you…"
As you exhale, pray, "…bring me all the way home."

LOOK

We leave Genesis for this one. Moses is talking to a people who have not been scattered yet, telling them what God will do when they are. Notice that both halves of the sentence belong to God.

Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.

Deuteronomy 30:3–4 NIV

ASK

> Read this carefully before you put your own situation into it. This was said to a nation, and the gathering took centuries. Abraham died with a scattered family and never saw one bit of it come back together. If you are waiting on a person to come home, this verse is not a schedule and it is not a guarantee about them. It is a promise about who God is and what he is doing with the whole long story.

- God is the subject of every verb here, including the scattering. What do you do with that?
- Three verses later God promises to circumcise their hearts so they can love him. Why do you think the gathering and the heart change belong together?
- What in your life feels too far gone to be gathered?

Write a prayer naming that one thing and handing it to God without telling him how or when to fix it.

Or, if you have prayed about that same thing for years already, write a prayer asking him for the patience to keep asking.

HEAR

You may feel the urge to check this off and get moving. That urge is the thing this exercise is working against.

Sit for two minutes. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.

FRIDAY

SELAH

GOD'S FAMILY IS WELCOMED HOME.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Last one. Not just of the week, but of the whole series. Before you read, take a minute and think back over the last twelve weeks and what has actually changed in you.

- 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.

EXHALE

You have done this four times already. Do not rush it because it is familiar. Breathe slowly and give God the first part of the day one more time.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

As you inhale, pray, "You have made room for me…"
As you exhale, pray, "…let me bring you my life."

LOOK

Isaiah is looking at a city and watching the whole world walk toward it. Read the names in this poem slowly. Midian. Ephah. Sheba. Kedar. Nebaioth. Every one of them is a son Abraham sent east in Genesis 25.

Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Isaiah 60:6–7 NIV

ASK

> This poem is full of gold and camels and flocks, and it is not a promise that God is going to make you rich. Look at where all of it ends up. It goes onto an altar. Nobody in this passage is accumulating anything. What is arriving is worship, not wealth.

- The sons who got sent east are the ones carrying the offering. What does that say about how God finishes a story?
- On Monday we read that Abraham was gathered. Here the word shows up again over a homecoming instead of a grave. What changes when you hear it that way?
- Genesis 12:3 said all nations would be blessed through Abraham, and Galatians 3:8 calls that the gospel announced in advance. You are one of those nations. Who is one person who needs to hear they were never outside of it?

Write a prayer for that person by name.

Or, if you are the one who has felt sent away, write a prayer thanking God that the story does not end where it stopped.

HEAR

This is the last of these for the series. Do not treat it as a finish line. The point was never the five days.

Sit for two minutes. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.