

Isaac, God Has no Grandchildren



The Bible Study:

What you will need:

- Bible, pen and note pad for each participant
- A stone to add to the altar—painted purple with a red stripe.
- Centrepiece— place cheap reading glasses and place them on a book beside a bouquet of flowers picked from the garden and tied with a ribbon. Also add a hanky or pair of gloves.
- You may also want to use tea pots as the centerpiece.
- Copy of the Salvation Army Doctrines
- Supper-Home baking for the treat. Serve tea in bone china tea cups; use the tea pots from the display.

Read the poem **When I am Old I Will Wear Purple**, *Jenny Joseph's 'Famous Poem.'* For more information about this poem go to (http://www.aztriad.com/pathmark/purple_poem.html)

Start with Focus on Grandparents

Grandparents are very important people in most cultures. Many cultures of the world revere their elders and look to them for wisdom. In most cultures today grandparents are the stable force in a family. Young married couples with children benefit greatly when they live near their parents and grandparents and can benefit from the support of loving and wise adults. This loving, supportive relationship is of course the ideal and not necessarily the reality. Today we are challenged with the fact that the nuclear family of the 1950s no longer exists.

In transient populations children often live far away from parents and their children are unable to experience the love and care of grandparents. Many grandparents are raising their grandchildren because the parents are addicted to drugs or in jail. For some families, grandparents are viewed as disposable burdens rather than treasures of wisdom.

- What are some of the challenges your corps and community faces in regards to the elderly in your community?
- How can your women's group or corps help meet some of those needs?
- What are some of the challenges of young families without grandparent support?
- Think of ways to help meet some of those needs.

The key verses for this study are Genesis 26:24, 25. "That night the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.' Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well." (NIV)

- This is the first time that we find it recorded that Isaac built an altar.

Isaac is an interesting study of the pattern and behaviour of a person who grows up in a home with believing parents. Abraham and Sarah had walked in obedience to the Lord for many years before Isaac was born. They made many mistakes and learned from those mistakes. Their belief system and character were well developed long before Isaac joined the family. Isaac was raised in a godly atmosphere and raised with the knowledge that he was the son of the promise. He was raised on the stories of how God appeared to his father Abraham and how Sarah had been confronted for laughing. (Genesis 18:9-15)

All of Isaac's life was lived around the knowledge of God's Presence and the covenant between God and Abraham. They lived a Bedouin lifestyle and travelled the land promised to Abraham's descendants. Those descendants would be through Isaac. When Isaac was weaned, he joined his father on a trip to make a sacrifice. Isaac knew first hand about his father's faith in God and his willingness to obey whatever God would ask him to do. All this is important and good, but until Isaac chose to believe and obey God, he did not have a personal relationship with the God of his father.

It would be wrong to assume that Isaac did not have a personal relationship with God until this point and just as wrong to assume he did. The Bible is silent about that fact. When the Bible is silent on a detail it gives us the opportunity to search the facts and come to our own conclusions.

- What do we know about Isaac until he builds this particular altar?

We know he is the son promised to Abraham and Sarah and was given to them in their old age. He was the son of promise given when it was seemingly impossible by the God who makes things possible. We know Isaac was raised by parents and a household of people who had journeyed many years in faith and obedience to God. These people were a first generation of believers to come to know God and His presence in the beginning of the covenant. When God revealed a new truth to them, they incorporated it into their lifestyle and character. Isaac was born into a family and a community of a living faith in God.

We are aware that Isaac participated in Abraham's most defining moment. We do not know if he participated willingly or against his will. It appears he complied with Abraham's strange instructions and yet Abraham did bind Isaac before placing him on the altar. Isaac was about 38 when his mother died and he was still unmarried. From Genesis 24:62, we observe that he lived on his own. After the two year time of mourning for Sarah, Abraham had arranged a marriage for Isaac.

Genesis 24:62-67 gives us a clue that Isaac was spiritually aware and may have had a personal relationship with God. His home was in the Negev and he had been visiting Beer-Lahai Roi. You may remember that translates as "the well of the God who sees me." (See Genesis 16:14) One evening he takes a walk out to the fields to meditate and that is the first time he lays eyes on Rebekah. When the servant tells Isaac the story of how Rebekah was the answer to his promise to Abraham and his prayer to God, Isaac marries her. Verse 67 mentions that she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother. So many details are left for us to imagine and question.

Was this love at first sight for Isaac? Was he a man of faith and recognized Rebekah as a woman of faith who could be his life partner and his equal in this challenge of being the promised son? Or was he just a very carefree, compliant man who was mourning for his mother and glad that someone had chosen a wife for him? It appears that Isaac was a man of faith and quite aware of the burden he carried in being the promised son. It appears that he was also a man of prayer. Look at Genesis 24:63 as it is written in the Amplified version, "And Isaac went out to meditate and bow down [in prayer] in the open country in the evening; and he looked up and saw that, behold, the camels were coming." Most of the translations concur that he was in the fields to think and pray although the meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain.

Genesis 24 is a story of a faith journey of three people. Abraham's servant begins and ends the journey fulfilling his vow to Abraham. He prays for help and receives it. Rebekah is the second main character of the story. She agrees to go with the servant and shows great faith and courage in the process. Isaac meets Abraham's servant and Rebekah in the field and in faith believes this is God's will for his life.

Reading Genesis 25 we learn that Isaac had a civil relationship with his brother Ishmael and we could guess that they had become friends in spite of the hostile relationship between their mothers. We learn that once again Isaac is a man who prays and believes because he pleads with the Lord to give Rebekah a child.

- Did Isaac wonder why God had promised countless descendants to Abraham through him if it seemed that God had closed the womb of Rebekah?
- Can you imagine the frustration he must have felt?

Isaac grew up with the burden of being the "son of promise" and all that entailed. He married the woman God gave him in faith believing that they were to contribute to the descendants of Abraham and have a son to whom he would pass on the blessing of the covenant. After many years of marriage, Rebekah could not conceive and give him a son. The Scripture says that Isaac pleaded with God to give Rebekah a child. God answered Isaac's prayer and gave Rebekah twins.

Esau, the first born must have seemed like the perfect answer to Isaac's prayer for an heir for the covenant. He was big and strong. He loved the fields. He loved to hunt. Jacob loved to stay near home. Perhaps he was a scholar or just a bit shy of adventure. Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah favoured Jacob. Esau was the heir apparent to the promises and blessings that God had given Abraham and Isaac, but he cared more about his appetite and needs than about the promises of God. (Genesis 25:27-34)

This story illustrated the truth of what God had spoken to Rebekah about her sons. Genesis 26 takes us on a journey to see that the sins of the father can be passed on to the sons just as the promised blessings. Isaac had grown up on the stories of Abraham and Sarah and surely he had heard the stories of how Abraham had lied about his relationship to Sarah. Rather than trust God for their safety, Abraham and Sarah claimed to be brother and sister rather than husband and wife in some of the places they travelled.

In Genesis 26 we see Isaac using the same tactic with one of Abraham's "old friends" Abimelech, king of the Philistines. His deception is discovered and Abimelech confronts Isaac. Deception is a sin that followed and haunted Abraham and his

descendants. Deception for Abraham and Isaac seemed to stem from fear for their safety. Yet in so many other ways these two men seemed to have complete faith in God. Deception seems to be a character flaw or practice that both Abraham and Isaac had difficulty surrendering to God to allow Him to refine them.

- Can you think of a character flaw or an area of your life that you have not surrendered to God?

After his encounter with Abimelech, Isaac continues his travels and we find the first recorded example of his building an altar. When Isaac moved to Beersheba, (well of oath) God appeared to him and made clear that the promises made to Abraham, also belonged to him. Do the words, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you" signify that because of the confrontation with Abimelech Isaac had done some good soul searching? Had he finally understood the stories of Abraham's deceptions were not examples but warnings?

He built an altar there and worshiped the Lord. Finally Isaac "owned" his inheritance and understood what it meant to be the son of promise. The promises were only his when he accepted them. He too would have a relationship with God. We know this to be true because Jesus points to the fact that God is the God of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac had chosen God.

God has no grandchildren. Faith of our fathers must become our faith if it really means anything. Practice of religion, conforming behaviour to that of the faith community, and memorizing the Bible are all important – but they are nothing if the individual does not have a relationship with God. Pray for the children of believing parents to receive Jesus as their Saviour and claim for themselves the blessings of God.