



DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

Week of September 19, 2021: Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-14

Life Group Gatherings:

The key to the Life Group gathering is to disciple one another. But this is not as daunting, intimidating, or perhaps even boring as it may sound. It begins with building community, which is best done in someone's home. Here is a recommended schedule for an in-home Life Group Gathering.

- Choose how often you will meet. Weekly is best but not always practical. We recommend either once or twice a month.
 - Have a meal together. It doesn't need to be fancy. One way to build community through the meal is to have different people bring different courses.
 - While eating, do a check in with one another. The Wesleyan question is "how does your soul prosper", which feels very 18th century. You don't need to ask that literal question, but get to the heart of it,
- (continued on flip side)

Welcome to Devotions for Life

This is a weekly resource for you to use individually, with your family, or in a Life Group. A Life Group is a small group of people committed to witnessing to Jesus Christ in the world and following his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This resource is a tool for doing the devotion component of that rule of life in a small group context. Hence, the "Life Group".

In this resource you will find the Scripture reference for the week, a simple agenda for a Life Group gathering, some questions for reflection and discussion, and some ideas for getting out into the world in acts of compassion and justice.



The Story: Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-14

Context: This is among the toughest texts in all of Scripture. Last week we were at the beginning. From there we leap to Abraham (Abram) and God's promise to make him the Father of many nations, which includes a son of his own. But his wife Sarah (Sarai) is barren.

which is a couple things. First, simply "how are you?" But also, "what are you doing to tend to your soul?" And third, "what does your soul long for today?" Another way of saying that is "how can we pray for you today?"

- After eating, take some time to pray for one another in whatever form works for your group, and somehow addressing the needs expressed in your conversation.
- Conclude the evening with the reading of the scripture passage, using any or all of the questions for discussion and reflection included here. You may also want to think back to the sermon on that text and discuss what you heard in it.

Acts of Compassion & Justice:

- With a friend or partner, consider taking a half day off work (if you need to) to help at Perspectives Kids Cafe some time soon.
- Do some research on child exploitation globally this week, and wonder about how you can contribute to efforts to end it.

Struggling to trust God, Abraham has a child with his slave named Hagar, and that son is named Ishmael. Not what God had in mind. Eventually Abraham and Sarah have Isaac. And that brings us to this difficult story today. As you read and discuss, know that it's ok to wrestle with and even reject that God actually called Abraham to do this, and know that many scholars also believe this to be God ending what was the somewhat normalized practice of child sacrifice in those days. Also remember that these stories take place before the people had the Torah to guide them.

Reading the Story: Remember this is all part of one big story. Read it that way. As you read, take your time. Read it paying attention to what jumps out to you. Is there a word or phrase or idea that hits you? Note if there is a question you have about it? Ask that question, search it, and wonder about it. Finally, ask yourself, "what is this story calling me to today?"

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

- What is your initial reaction to this story? How did it make you feel? What caught your attention?
- How many times does Abraham say "Here I am..."? Why is the repetition of this question significant?
- How do you imagine the placing of Isaac on the altar actually happened? Was there a struggle? Did Isaac just quietly go along with it?
- Why do you think Abraham goes along with the plan?
- Verse 22:2 says Isaac is Abraham's "only son". Look back to Genesis 16:15 (as well as 21:8-21). Is Isaac really Abraham's only son? What of Ishmael?
- As child sacrifice was a cultural norm at that time, what might this story be telling us about cultural norms today? Can you think of any that God may want to end?
- What are we to take from this story? Is it helpful to us? If so, how? How does it draw us closer to God? How does it connect to Jesus, if at all?