UPC Family Devotional

September – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week:

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

-Genesis 21:1

Sep. 5 Monday Genesis 19:23-29

After some initial reluctance, Lot is willing to let go of his home and follow the Lord's command. His wife, however, directly disobeys the angel’s instruction to flee and *not* look back. Her act is not just a curious glance at what has become of her home; it represents a heart that has rejected God's grace and salvation. By looking back, she fails to trust God's plans for her and, instead, reveals her strong attachment to the wicked culture she was called to abandon completely. Her transformation into a pillar of salt is a reminder to us that God wants our repentance to be complete and uncompromising. When God calls us to turn away from wickedness, let us be fully committed to Him - no looking back.

What aspect of your old, sinful life do you sometimes miss or long for? How is God prompting you to make a decisive break from your past sin?

As the scene shifts back to Abraham, we are reminded that the destruction of the wicked cities and the salvation of Lot’s family began with God's desire to reveal His plans to His chosen servant. Today, God continues to disclose the depths of His character and purposes to His children. He teaches us what we must do to be saved, the daily wisdom we need to live in this world, and even His plans leading up to the final judgment of the world. God reveals himself to us because He loves us and wants us to know Him intimately. May we never neglect the precious gift and opportunity of learning His will as we spend time with Him through the Word.

What have you learned about God's will and purposes this year? How does reading the Bible help you grow closer to God?

Sep. 6 Tuesday Genesis 19:30-38

Lot finally settles in the mountains with his daughters, but this leaves them completely isolated. Desperate to have children, Lot’s daughters scheme to get their father drunk so that they can sleep with him and fall pregnant. Once again we see Lot’s family making decisions driven not by God’s promises but by their earthly longings. It is easy to let the dominant voices of our culture convince us into believing that we need certain things or achievements in order to be fulfilled. God's call on our life, however, is plain and simple: to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. May we be careful that our careers, families, and personal pursuits do not become hindrances to our highest calling.

How did the pressures of this world that disrupt your pursuit of God's Kingdom? How is God calling you to reorder some of your priorities in life?

Lot's incestuous relations with his daughters result in the birth of two sons who become the patriarchs of the Moabites and the Ammonites. We know from the rest of biblical history that these nations will become a constant thorn in Israel’s side, and the Pagan practices they develop will drive them to the brink of destruction. When we make decisions based on our worldly desires rather than the plans of God, the consequences of our disobedience can extend far beyond our personal circumstances. Throughout Scripture, this warning comes to us in the metaphor of yeast working through dough- small compromises that can cause wide- reaching harm when left unchecked. May we therefore be vigilant to root out any and all sin from our lives.

How have individual decisions impacted your family throughout the generations? How can you practice godly wisdom when making decisions that will have a long-term impact?

Sep. 7 Wednesday Genesis 20:1-18

From the beginning of his journey, Abraham experiences God’s help and favor time and time again. But despite this, we discover Abraham cowering for the second time. As he did in Egypt, Abraham asks Sarah to tell Abimelech that she is his sister and, once again, allows his wife to be taken away by another man. Instead of trusting in God, Abraham relies on his cunning to keep himself safe. Instead of reprimanding him for his lack of faith, however, God continues to show him favor, warning Abimelech to refrain from sinning against Him and commanding him to return Sarah to Abraham. In His grace, God extends favor to the undeserving, a gift that cannot be earned but only freely received.

When has God responded to your doubts with gentleness? What current situation do you struggle to end trust God with?

Having discovered that Sarah is not Abraham’s sister but his wife, Abimelech confronts Abraham for his dishonesty. This is a precarious situation because Abimelech is the ruler of the land. From a human point of view, Abraham has nothing to expect but retaliation. Yet somehow, he comes out of the situation not only unharmed but wealthier. There is no explanation for this outcome other than God turning Abraham’s evil circumstances into good because of His covenant with him. Because we are in God's hands, even a precarious situation can become a source of blessing, and because we are in His hands, our lives are anchored in peace and hope, and we can become a blessing to others.

When have you found yourself in a situation that was beyond your own strength to solve? How did God carry you through it and what did you learn?

Sep. 8 Thursday Genesis 21:1-7

Abraham was 75 years old when God first gave him the promise that he will become a great nation. After a long twenty-five years of waiting, Abraham finally receives the child of promise, Isaac. In the eyes of the world, this timeline is excruciatingly slow. But Scripture points out that from God’s standpoint, this is the exact timing he had in mind all along. History, particularly the history of our salvation, demonstrates that God's timing is always perfect and exact. When we feel like God's work is delayed, let us remember that his plans, his ways, and his timing are perfect. Trust in the Lord and be at rest. Everything will go according to His plan.

When have you seen God’s perfect timing at work? What prayers are you still waiting for God to answer?

In Abraham’s time, having children was important for a variety of reasons. It meant a stronger clan, and through one's offspring the family name was passed down and its legacy secured. A wife who bore children was considered honorable to her husband and divinely blessed. Knowing this, we can only imagine the shame and pain Sarah must have carried for most of her life as a childless woman. This all changes, however, when God miraculously grants her a son and brings her from sorrow to laughter. And Sarah rightly acknowledges that God, not her son, is the source of her joy. Let us likewise look to God as our source and celebrate Him for the good things we received.

When his God turned a painful situation around in an unexpected way? How do you encourage yourself to wait for God?

Sep. 9 Friday Genesis 21:8-21

Sensing a threat to Isaac in Ishmael’s mockery, Sarah requests that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael, that they may not interfere with her son’s inheritance. God assures Abraham that this is the proper thing to do in light of His promise, even though Abraham’s fatherly affection causes him to worry. This command may seem harsh to us, yet when we realize that God promises to also make a nation of Ishmael, we become aware of the bountiful nature of God's unmerited favor. He shows grace both to those who have received His promises of redemption and those who have not. Ultimately, every seeming unfairness reminds us that we deserve nothing good from God, yet God grants grace to all His fallen image-bearers, both salvific and common.

What are some examples of the grace God has given to all human beings? How does God’s grace help you face seemingly unfair situations?

When Hagar runs out of water, she expects the worst. She cannot bear to see her son die of thirst so she places him at a distance. As she cries tears of despair, God hears the voice of her son, meets their present needs, and guarantees their future, promising that Ishmael will become a great nation. God fulfills His word and remains with Ishmael as he grows up. This is not a one-time blessing; God watches over Ishmael continuously even though he is outside His covenant. This is a clear picture of God's unfathomable mercy. He takes care of us, not because of who we are or what we can do for Him, but because of His gracious and compassionate heart.

When have you most needed God’s compassion? In times of difficulty, how has God blessed you beyond what you thought you needed?

Sep. 10 Saturday Genesis 21:22-34

Abimelech, whom we encountered in the previous chapter, comes to Abraham and requests that the latter swear to deal with himself and his descendants kindly. Abimelech wants a perpetual guarantee of security because he recognizes the favor of God upon Abraham. Indeed, God had already begun to fulfill His promise to make Abraham’s name great. But rather than asking Abraham to help him know and trust this powerful and faithful God, Abimelech is more interested in keeping Abraham at a safe distance. Let us be careful never to use God or other believers as means to an end. Peace and security are blessings that point us to the only guaranteed source of safety: God Himself.

Which of your personal goals tempt to use God rather than serve Him? Where does God stand in your plans to secure a good future for yourself and your family?

The power struggle continues as Abraham reproves Abimelech for a well that the latter’s men seized. Abimelech, on the other hand, tries to shift the blame to Abraham. To solve this conflict, Abraham cuts a covenant with Abimelech. In addition, he gives Abimelech seven ewe lambs as a witness that the well is his. And so doing, Abraham secures a source of water while he dwelled in the land of the philistines. Although this all might seem like the fruit of human wisdom, Abraham recognizes God's grace in his securing of the well. His commemoration of “the eternal God” illustrates that God is growing Abraham’s faith as He provides for his stay in the promised land.

What are recent moments when God grew your faith through seemingly mundane provisions? How can you foster a habit of commemorating God's grace in your life?