UPC Family Devotional

September – Week 3

Memory Verse of the Week:

“Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord.”

-Genesis 26:25a

Sep 19 Monday Genesis 25:19-34

Like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah overcome childlessness through the promise and the power of God. And just as there was conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, Isaac’s twin sons are destined for strife. Conflict between brothers is a recurring theme in Genesis, a testimony to the destructive effects of the fall that trace back to the first offsprings of man: Cain and Abel. In each instance, the first born is surpassed by the younger brother. It is easy for readers today to miss how shocking this would have been for that time and culture. But the message is clear: God’s sovereign ways are not dictated by social or cultural expectations, or by any human standard. He chooses His own by His divine perfect will.

How do you respond to the truth that God is sovereign in whom He chooses? How would you answer someone who argues that it is unfair for God to choose some over others?

The book of Hebrews describes Esau as “godless,” a man who “for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son” (Heb. 12:16). These words are meant as a warning and encouragement to Christians who are weak and weary from their trials and tempted to run to the world. We must claim to God’s promises by faith. It is easy, especially when we deal with discomfort or suffering, to place our felt needs above God’s blessings. The world offers many different kinds of “stew” that promise to satisfy our hunger, but none of them are lasting or eternal. God, on the other hand, offers us inestimable blessings through His son, the “first born over all creation” (Col. 1:15).

When are you tempted to trade God's blessings for immediate gratification? What convinces you that God's promises are worth waiting for?

Sep 20 Tuesday Genesis 26:1-11

Children learn not only from their parent’s faithfulness but from their failures as well. As famine hits the land, Isaac seems inclined to make the same decision as his father to leave, perhaps intending to go down to Egypt. But God appears to him, expressly urging him not to. He reminds him of the promises given to his family and guarantees His presence and blessing if he remains in the land. Isaac, in turn, responds in faithful obedience. In his patience and mercy God walks with each generation, training our families to grow in our capacity to rely on Him. Families built on faith and the promises of God pass on blessings to future generations.

How have older believers inspired you to trust in God? How can you use your faith to encourage others who are younger in the faith?

Unlike his father, Isaac demonstrates trust and obedience to God by remaining in the land despite the famine. However, like his father, he eventually gives in to fear and lies to the Philistines, telling them that Rebekah is his sister. Once again, a Pagan king discovers the truth and does all he can to avoid the judgment of God. There's a truth here that we would do well to learn: our actions and behavior as God's people are either potential blessings or stumbling blocks for our friends and neighbors. It is also true that, at times, God can correct us through unlikely means. Let us heed these rebukes so that our faith and testimony may be purified.

When have you acted out of fear rather than faith? How has this impacted those around you?

Sep 21 Wednesday Genesis 26:12-22

Envy over the success of others, especially when they get what they want for ourselves, is something that many of us have experienced. Jealous of Isaac’s growing wealth and influence, his Philistine neighbors fill the wells that water his flocks with dirt, and Abimelech tells him to leave. Isaac, for his part, does not use God’s gifts and the promised blessings as a weapon to intimidate his neighbors. His attitude is that of a peacemaker. He simply moves and reopens the wells the Philistines stopped. When the world treats us with hostility, we never need to respond in kind. We can be confident that God will vindicate us and provide what we need in the meantime.

How do you respond when others oppose you and the promises and plans God has for your life? What struggles do you encounter as you seek to live as a peacemaker?

Isaac is committed to peace with his neighbors. Twice, his servants dig wells that result in disputes and opposition from the Philistines. On both occasions, Isaac chooses the way of peace and accommodation. The third well dug by his servants is free from conflict, so Isaac names that well Rehoboth because God has given Isaac “room” to receive his blessings. Isaac's charity and patient endurance are the results of his faith and humility. Rather than fighting his battles the world's way, he chooses the way of peace, believing in the promises of God for his life and the family. The attitudes and ways of the world lead only to conflict and opposition, but the ways of God's Kingdom lead to blessing and peace.

How his faith and humility in the face of opposition resulted in God’s blessings in your life? What are some ways Christians can demonstrate faith and humility in our world today?

Sep 22 Thursday Genesis 26:23-35

Famine, strife, and conflict follow Isaac up to this point in Genesis. It is only natural, then, that he would fear for his family and the future. In the midst of these troubles, God appears to Isaac to quiet his fears and assure him that he and his descendants will be blessed. Soon after the Lord’s visitation, Abimelech and he's entourage come to Isaac to request a peace treaty. throughout his trials, Isaac faithfully casts himself upon God, and this brings God's blessings on him and those living around him. When we respond with grace and kindness in the face of hostility, we open the door for God's peace that brings blessing to us and those we encounter.

What fears do you need to bring before God today? How can you train yourself to respond to hostility with grace?

Chapter 26 began with famine and a struggle over wells, only to end with the discovery of water for Isaac and his household. In the arid climate of the Middle East, water is *life*. In the New Testament, Jesus likens the abundant life he came to bring us to living water. Throughout Isaac’s struggle to find a source of water, he remains in the land and in the end, he is blessed. When we go through hardship, it is tempting to run away from our problems. But in merely seeking an escape, we often miss out on the blessings of endurance that God has in store for us. Let us take courage, looking to our everlasting source of living water.

How has God used hardship to shape your character and commitment to Christ? What have you learned about God and His ways through the trials you have faced?

Sep 23 Friday Genesis 27:1-14

Before Esau and Jacob were even born, the Lord told the Rebekah that the younger son would be greater than the older. Despite God's clear intentions, Isaac promises to covenantal blessing to Esau, probably because he did not want to go against the custom. Though we cannot be certain why Isaac chose to divert from the will of God, we do know that it is human nature to follow one's habits and impulses even when they conflict with God's desires. The good news is that God's purposes for us are not limited by our failures; His plans will come to pass in spite of us. In light of God's passion to fulfill His will in our lives, let us strive to follow His ways.

When have you chosen to follow the way of the world over the will of God? What caused you to make that choice?

When Rebekah hears of Isaac’s intentions, she devised a plan for Jacob to trick his way into receiving the blessing instead of Esau. We do not know whether she does this because she remembers God's words or because Jacob is her favored son, but her methods are clearly deceitful. Here, we see the sovereignty of God on full display, working to fulfill His plans even amid the simple schemes of man. There is nothing that is outside of God's control; He is able to achieve His purpose through us even though our actions are so often inclined toward evil. This precious truth is a comforting reminder to us when we stumble and make mistakes, for God is always able to turn evil into good.

When have you experienced God bring about His goodwill amid sinful or painful circumstances? How should we live in light of God's absolute sovereignty?

Sep 24 Saturday Genesis 27:15-29

Jacob lies to Isaac and even misuses the name of God as a part of his deception. The nature of deceit is that it tends to escalate, as the lies build upon each other, dulling our conscience in the process. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, deceit can quickly grow out of control. While lying can sometimes feel like the easy way to get what we want, our lies will inevitably catch up to us- as Jacob will soon find out. The truth, on the other hand, may be confronting and uncomfortable at first, but it will set us free from the burdens of guilt, shame, and secrecy. May we always seek to live with honesty and integrity, as nothing can be hidden from God.

Have you ever been caught in a lie? What were the consequences?

Jacob receives a blessing that he does not deserve. As the younger son, it goes against custom to receive a blessing usually reserved for the eldest. Furthermore, he is a liar who only receives the blessing by deceiving his old, ailing father. In Jacob’s story, we see a foreshadowing of our own undeserved blessing. According to tradition, God’s blessing was reserved for physical descendants of Abraham, but he chose to graciously adopt us into His family. In addition, we were all born into sin and deserve God's wrath, but He chose to send His son to suffer the consequences of our sin so that we could receive the blessing of eternal life. Praise God for His amazing grace and love, poured out abundantly upon undeserving sinners like us.

When have you received favor that you did not deserve? How did this make you feel toward the giver?