



The two key words that form the basis of the entire chapter are: “_____”

- –Make your descendants into a great nation
- Give you a land in which to dwell
- Bless all other nations through the nation of Israel

1. God’s covenant is a _____ one.

The first lesson of how God builds a nation: _____ – one _____ at a time.

2. God purposely works through _____ vessels.

God uses _____ people to fulfill His _____ promises.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 2 Cor. 4:7

3. God’s promise is not dependent on our performance, but our _____.

“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Gen. 15:6

Today’s Equipping Point

no _____

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. Ephesians 1:13-14

Discussion Questions

1. In what personal, individual ways has God spoken to **you**?
2. In what ways have you seen God use your brokenness to further His purposes?
3. With respect to your family, what will you intentionally **IN**source this week?

Teaching Script

What to do? In Chapter One of *The Story*, everything had started so well...so much promise.

God had given Adam and Eve every chance to succeed, but instead they chose for themselves. Their sin nature was passed down to such a horrific degree that God turned the great cosmic Etch-A-Sketch over and shook it until the earth literally had a clean slate. He had created mankind so that he could lavish his love upon them, but they chose independence and ingratitude. He could justifiably have written us off as easily as Countrywide writes off non-performing loans...cast us aside like a failed high school lab experiment. But as we saw last week, he saved a remnant – Noah’s family – to give us a mulligan and start over. The only problem was that sin remained – not even the flood could wipe out the evil inclination of man’s heart. What now?

The Upper Story of God’s pursuit and redemption of the world is on grand display in chapter 2 because, as the master builder and architect, God takes things into his own hands. Man could not be trusted to do the right thing...left on our own, the earth would again become as corrupt as the pre-flood days. So God, in his astounding courtship of humanity, takes charge:

The two key words that form the basis of this entire chapter is: “***I will...***” Words of covenant commitment and promise that would mean nothing if spoken by anyone else. Man’s promises to follow God, to be faithful, have about as much street cred as Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac or Lehman Bros. We had demonstrated our fickleness: obeying God when it’s convenient, but ditching him when it’s not.

This time, there could be no “if’s” – no contingencies. The plan to save mankind had to rest on ***bedrock***, so God said, “***I will...***” His words were the ironclad guarantee. And so, his master plan to restore us to Himself gets a fresh start with these words. In spite of our unreliable, inconsistent, erratic behavior, God is ***determined*** to fulfill His promise. And so God says:

I will . . .

- Make your descendants into a great nation
- Give you a land in which to dwell
- Bless all other nations through the nation of Israel

The first thing to note about this chapter (on outline) is this:

1. God’s covenant is a ***personal*** one.

I think if I were God I’d be tempted to take a shortcut and pick one cloudless night, wake everybody up and rearrange the stars where they spelled the words, “GOD IS” or “I EXIST,” where suns dot the I’s and comets cross the T’s. Can you imagine the results of such a grand demonstration? There would be no need for a personal revelation, really

no need for the Holy Spirit to take up residence within us – just a permanent celestial billboard. In effect, God would *outsource* the proof of his existence to the universe. Some would think it was a hoax, but I suspect most people would walk outside and fall to their knees. Some would run back into their houses in sheer terror, but eventually everyone would see the words GOD IS, blazing in the heavens. Wars would stop, crime would stop, churches would fill to overflowing.

For a while, that would be enough. Decades, centuries later, every night, God’s proof of himself would be blazing away in the heavens. But there would still be something missing: while God was demonstrating himself to be Lord of the Heavens, what I need to know is, does His Spirit move within ME, over the turbulent waters of my life. God may prove his existence with a message in the stars, but unless he speaks to me and my circumstance, unless his existence changes MY world, does it really matter that he set the whole thing spinning millions of years ago?

So this is the first lesson of *how God builds a nation: individually – one person at a time*. He appeared and spoke to Abraham several times: when he first called him, when the three visitors came by, to announce Sarah’s pregnancy...over and over again, God’s arrival is a personal one. When Jacob had gotten by all those years with trickery and cunning, God knew a personal encounter was needed to move him from con artist to convert, so he appeared and wrestled with Jacob all night. And when it was over, Jacob understood grace for the first time.

Instead of writing an impersonal message in the stars, God comes to us, *one-by-one*, in the circumstances of our lives. Where has he appeared to you?

- Perhaps through the tough but honest counsel of a friend?
- Through the undeserved love and acceptance of your wife? I can’t tell you how many men I’ve met who have humbly labeled their wives the Holy Spirit. They see and hear God speaking to them daily through a woman who knows them completely, and who has permission to speak the truth openly. Does your wife have that permission?
- Perhaps God has personally appeared to you through an obstacle, a defeat – some sort of setback that stops you dead in your tracks and requires you to work out some character issues.
- Has God personally revealed himself through the imperfect, flawed characters we studied last year like Elijah who was depressed, Job who was defiant, or Naaman whose pride almost left him a permanent leper?

Where has he met you, challenged you, broken you, for his sake? The first lesson of chapter two of *The Story* is that God is so gracious, so loving, that he meets each of us not through a celestial text message, but in the daily events of our lives: a Creator humble enough to approach us in the smile of a child, in a career setback, on the battlefield, or under our own roof, always willing to process with us, to wrestle with us, to entertain our hard questions. A God who doesn’t need to explain himself to anyone – but who, out of love, has touched each one of us personally, and led us from darkness to light. THAT is a God worthy of our worship.

And that is point #1 today: God doesn't write messages in the stars; he invites and solicits and coaxes...he forages through a wasteland of sin and debris, *just to win you back*.

Takeaway #2 in this story of Abraham and his family is this:

2. God purposely works through broken vessels.

You know, after reading chapter 2, it would seem God's choice of a nation and a people, with all due respect, wasn't all that solid. These guys were a mess!

Look what happened:

- Abraham picked up stakes and moved all right, but he lied twice about Sarah not being his wife to save his own neck, apparently not trusting God's promise enough to keep him alive.
- Because God didn't produce an heir as quickly as they thought he should, they opted for a workaround and Abraham slept with Sarah's maid Hagar, which led to all sorts of hurt feelings and domestic complications.
- When Isaac, the son of promise finally comes, he marries Rebekah and raises one of the most dysfunctional families recorded in the Bible. Isaac favors Esau, but Rebekah favors Jacob, and the kids become pawns in this passive-aggressive relationship of their parents. Anyone ever seen a child become a puppet between two parents in a dysfunctional family? This is Isaac and Rebekah to a "T".
- As the parents play the kids against each other, Rebekah creates this elaborate hoax to trick her husband into giving the paternal blessing to Jacob, not Esau.
- Jacob, who has now learned that deception and trickery is obviously the way to get ahead in life, so he plays his brother for a fool and then has to get out of Dodge to save his own skin.
- Jacob's uncle Laban, also a graduate of the Machiavellian School of Deceit, slips the wrong daughter between the sheets and cons Jacob into another seven years of work.
- Jacob gets back at his uncle, however, by concocting an elaborate breeding caper with the goat herds that guarantee Jacob has the last laugh.

Now remember, this is the family through whom all nations of the world would be blessed!

The point is this: God uses broken people to fulfill His unbreakable promises. On a day-to-day basis, God's people continue to make bad choices that expose their sin nature. And from chapter 2 through the rest of the Bible, God uses deeply flawed, schizophrenic people to illustrate the Upper Story of his pursuit and redemption of the world. Who would've thunk? Samson? David? Jonah? These guys were a mess!

(pause...)

I can't tell you how many men I've spoken with that are convinced that the mistakes of their past disqualifies them from leading their families well today. If you leave with nothing else this morning, leave with this: if God could use the liars, cheats, cowards, swindlers and fools from this chapter to build a nation, he can use you. In fact, these guys were the foundation – he began the whole process of building a nation on the backs of this rag-tag band of misfits.

So this morning, wherever you are on your journey – kicking the tires, checking out this whole Jesus concept, a long-time believer, or just convicted you should do something but you're not sure what, this chapter is for you. This is why Paul says:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 2 Cor. 4:7

It's not about you, or your competence, or your personal toolkit. To be a man of God requires you to do the hardest thing possible: give up your self-sufficiency and admit you're a fragile, broken, imperfect clay pot instead of Mr. Fix-it. Then, then, you'll start to resemble these guys, these Keystone Kops of the Old Testament – because God's selection of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was not based on their IQ, or the title on their business card, but on one thing and one thing only: their faith.

Which leads us to point #3:

3. God's promise is not dependent on our performance, but our faith.

After such a devastating start in Chapter 1, what could Adam and Eve do? Their disobedience, the fratricide between their sons, and a worldwide, soggy mulligan – what could the people do to restore what was lost?

The answer: believe. Look at the title of the lesson today: What sin changed in the Garden, faith overcomes for the rest of *The Story*. In spite of their failures, God's people respond in faith. Abraham picks up stakes and travels to a foreign land just because God said to. He graciously gives his nephew Lot the choice real estate, having faith God would still bless him. Abraham and Sarah laugh hysterically when they finally see God fulfill his promise through the birth of a son, Isaac. And in one of the most touching scenes in the OT, God joins with them in the absurdity of the situation by having them name their son Isaac, which means "laughter" in Hebrew. Later, in a shocking episode, Abraham shows he is willing to go so far as sacrificing his only son, Isaac, because of his faith in God.

Later on, this crazy, dysfunctional family, with all its flaws, continued to demonstrate faith. By faith, Isaac finds a wife for his son. Jacob comes to faith after literally wrestling with God. By faith, Esau also shows Jacob grace and forgiveness. With every story, we are reminded that God works through flawed people who take steps of faith. It turns out the people of the Old Testament were saved the same way you and I are: by faith.

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

Romans 4:20-21

The key verse of the chapter is:

"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Genesis:15:6

Therein lies the Gospel itself. Abraham had faith in God, and God deposited righteousness into Abraham's account. It was unearned – it was a gift. God took something that belonged only to Jesus – righteousness – and gave it to Abraham as his own.

Once again, a whisper of Jesus appears – a key clue to the Upper Story is given: the Bible says that as Abraham and Isaac journeyed up the mountain for the sacrifice of this long-awaited boy on whom the future Kingdom rested, the wood for the sacrifice was placed on Isaac, just as Jesus was forced to carry the cross. Abraham's extraordinary faith is what saved him, just as today, putting our faith in Christ saves us. It's just that simple: to believe, despite the messages to be self-made, independent and cool, that God can use even the weakest and the lamest of us to do something miraculous.

Who would have guessed that God would keep his promise and Sarah would deliver a baby with one foot in maternity, and the other foot in the geriatric ward? Who would have guessed that even after Isaac and Rebekah used their sons as pawns, Esau would later have the grace and mercy to forgive the conniving Jacob? In case you missed it, here again is the Upper Story of God: a wronged brother named Esau, cheated out of what was rightly his, offering his younger brother forgiveness and grace. *Esau* is a harbinger of Jesus himself.

The signs and the clues of God's grand plan of forgiveness and redemption are woven throughout chapter two...which brings us to our weekly **Equipping Point**.

Men, to lead your families well this week, here's the deal: **no outsourcing**.

No outsourcing. God could have easily written a message in the stars and outsourced his revelation to the Milky Way galaxy. But He said, "**I** will..." He inspired and laughed with Abraham, He personally wrestled with Jacob. And now He personally resides in every believer by depositing His essence into each of us:

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.

Ephesians 1:13-14

The Equipping Point today is: **No outsourcing**. As good as our children's and student ministries are at Oak Hills, our children's spiritual formation is NOT their responsibility. Nothing – nothing in the world replaces YOUR VOICE – not a teacher, not a youth pastor, not a preacher. Even if you're not sure how, even if you're a little self-conscious, it's OK! God doesn't grade prayers on eloquence – he looks at the heart behind the request.

Last week I was in my office and Catherine sheepishly walks in and says, “Um, uh, Dad, could you, uh, help me with my geometry?” She's smart enough to know I'm one of the last people to be of any help whatsoever when it comes to geometry. And *at that point, I had a choice* – fear almost took over. I could have outsourced it, and said, “Go ask your mother.” Or, “Well, have you asked your teacher for help?” Or, “How about if I get you a tutor next week and they'll help you?”

But something stopped me, and I said, “OK, let's take a look.” It took us about 45 minutes, but I gotta tell you, that 45 minutes changed my week, because at the end, after we had waded through it together, and re-familiarized myself with complementary and linear angles, she said, “Now I understand... Why can't **you** be my geometry teacher?”

Believe me, the last thing Clark H.S. needs is for me to be one of their geometry teachers. But I've discovered that trying is what counts. Like we said a couple of weeks ago, it's not about having all the answers, or being afraid to look clueless to your kids, because I really was. But we sat down together and tried to work through it. It didn't dawn on me until after we were done that it honored my daughter that even though we might have totally bombed the homework, the bigger message was that she was important enough to invest the time.

Our resolve today is NO OUTSOURCING – no “go ask your mom” or “let's find a tutor.”

Just imagine... just imagine if God had somehow outsourced us, instead of depositing his Spirit within us. The message this week is to have faith that God will equip you to love your wife, pray with your kids, or even do geometry. The rule is: no outsourcing... YOUR voice is too valuable, too prized. YOUR voice, like God's is irreplaceable.