

Bible Study Discussion Guide

Genesis 21:1–21 | The God of Absurd Promises

Central Theme: God is faithful to His promises, even when their fulfillment seems impossible. His plans unfold according to His timing, through His grace, and ultimately find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Icebreaker

Have you ever waited a long time for something you were hoping would happen, only to discover that the waiting changed you in ways you didn't expect? What did you learn through that experience?

Discussion Questions

1. Trusting God's promises when circumstances seem impossible (Genesis 21:1–7)

Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for God to fulfill His promise of a son. Along the way, they struggled with doubt and tried to accomplish God's purposes through their own efforts.

- Why do you think waiting on God's timing can be so difficult?
- In what areas of life are we most tempted to take matters into our own hands rather than trust God's promises?

2. Living by grace rather than our own efforts (Galatians 4:21–31)

The sermon contrasts Isaac, the child of promise, with Ishmael, the child born through human effort. Paul uses this distinction to illustrate the difference between relying on God's grace and relying on ourselves.

- Even as Christians who understand salvation is by grace, how might we still fall into the trap of trying to earn God's approval?
- What would it look like to depend more fully on God's grace in our everyday lives?

3. Letting go of what competes with our trust in God (Genesis 21:8–14; Galatians 5:24)

Abraham's separation from Ishmael was deeply painful, yet God called him to trust His promise concerning Isaac. The sermon also challenges us to put to death the sinful desires that compete with our devotion to Christ.

- What are some things—even good things—that can become more important to us than trusting and obeying God?

- How can we distinguish between surrendering something to God and simply giving up when life becomes difficult?

4. God's compassion in the midst of suffering (Genesis 21:15–21)

When Hagar and Ishmael were desperate in the wilderness, God heard their cries and provided for them. Even though Isaac was the chosen son through whom God's covenant promises would continue, God did not abandon Ishmael.

- What does God's response to Hagar and Ishmael teach us about His character?
- How should God's compassion toward those who are suffering shape the way we treat people, especially those who are different from us?

5. God's promises and His heart for the nations (Genesis 12:2–3; 21:18; Galatians 3:8–9)

God promised to bless all nations through Abraham. Although Isaac was the chosen son of promise, God's ultimate purpose was much greater than one family or nation. His plan of salvation would ultimately be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

- How does understanding God's larger plan to bless all nations change the way we view people who do not yet know Christ?
- What responsibility do we have as recipients of God's grace to share that grace and the hope of the Gospel with others?

Personal Application — Living in Light of God's Promises

This week, consider three areas of your life:

1. Trust: Where am I struggling to trust God's timing or promises? What would trusting Him look like in that situation?
2. Surrender: Is there a sinful attitude, desire, or pattern of self-reliance that I need to surrender to Christ and actively put to death?
3. Mission: Who is someone in my life who needs to experience God's compassion and hear about His promises fulfilled in Jesus? What intentional step can I take toward that person this week?

Closing Challenge: God's faithfulness is not measured by how quickly He fulfills our expectations, but by His unwavering commitment to accomplish His promises. We are called to trust His Word, rest in His grace, and participate in His mission.

Suggested closing prayer: Ask God to deepen our trust in His promises, free us from self-reliance, and give us His heart for those who have yet to experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ.