

life group study guide

4/19/2015 Big People – Little God

Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by people in your past.

Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by the assumptions of the world.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12: 11-13

- At this point, Abraham has just heard God's call and began his journey to a new land.
 - How exciting to get a word spoken over you by God and to receive a promise.
 - But then immediately, he moves into a dry desert and a famine hits! That has the potential to shake a person.
 - Could this have increased his propensity to fear?
- How does this story mirror the story of the Hebrew people and Egypt found later in Exodus?
 - What similarities are there? *(famine drove them to Egypt, Sarah was "enslaved" in a way like the Hebrew people, God got the Egyptians' attention by inflicting a serious disease on them, eventually Pharaoh asked Abraham to get out of there, Abraham left with some of the Egyptians' wealth that the Pharaoh gave him).*
 - What differences are there?
 - Do you think this is significant? Why?

Genesis 20

- Could this be an example of a behavior pattern? We saw the same decision and actions in Genesis 20 that we saw in Genesis 12. God decided to include this similar story twice in his Word. That lends significance to the story.
 - Why do you think Abraham repeated himself?
 - Why do you think God wanted us to see this repeat?
- Take a moment to flip back through Chapters 13-19 and see what happened to Abraham between these two events. *(the separation of Abram and Lot, Abram rescues Lot from warring kings and is blessed by Melchizedek, God's amazing covenant with Abram with smoking firepots and blazing torches, relationship with Hagar and Sarah's jealousy and Ishmael's birth, God's reaffirmation of the covenant and the introduction of circumcision, the promise that Sarah would bear the heir, three heavenly visitors meet Abraham, Abraham pleads for Sodom, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because of the absence of any righteous men there)*
 - Do any of these events influence or explain Abraham's repeat behavior – fear, decision, lies?
 - *Identify where Abraham's fear of man had been intensified by people in his past.*
- Notice Abraham's explanation for this "repeat-behavior" (20:11-13)
 - His assumptions about the people who lived there
 - Worries for his own life
 - Rationale that he really didn't fully lie
 - Excuse that he is wandering from his father's household by God's order
 - What do we learn about Abraham from the explanation he chooses to share here?

life group study guide

- *Was Abraham's fear of man intensified by his assumptions of the world?*
 - It seems like the horrible vices of Sodom convinced Abraham that all other cities of Canaan were equally corrupt.
 - In both places, Abraham assumed the worst about the people who lived there. He even gave this excuse to Abimelech when he asked Abraham why he lied: *Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place.'"*
 - His prediction about the beauty of his wife came true. Foreign leaders did praise her beauty and take her as their wife.
 - But was the second-half of that prediction true? We don't know if they would have killed her husband (Abraham) in order to have her.
 - In fact, the manner in which they conducted themselves after the fact makes it more likely that they would not have killed Abraham.
- Was there a bit of wise caution and preparedness in Abraham's decision? Or was it simply a prejudiced and impulsive decision?

APPLICATION:

- How do you keep yourself from making a "repeat-poor decision" when you find yourself in similar circumstances?
- How do we keep ourselves from defaulting to an old pattern and repeating a folly?
- How do we not only ask for forgiveness of a sin, but change our heart and mind's direction so that we won't go there again?
- Does anyone have an example of this in their own life (repeating a bad decision, or wising up and not repeating a bad decision)?
- Why and how are these assumptions about the world and others, and expecting the worst out of others, wrong? How does God want us to view and interact with the people around us?

FEARS & DECISIONS:

- Abram's fears are evident in this Scripture. (*He fears being a foreigner in a new land. He fears for his own safety. He fears for his own life. He fears people who are not like him. He fears powerful leaders*).
 - In fact, it seems like in this instance his fears overshadow any other character trait or inclination. (*like trust or courage or selflessness*)
 - He was more about self-preservation than bone-deep character or BIG-God-faith.
 - If God is trustworthy and keeps his promises, then we would have to come to this conclusion: Abraham's life would have been as well protected without the fraud as with it. If he was to be the father of a great nation, he would not have died in Egypt, nor in Gerar.
- 1) Abram's fear affected his decisions and his integrity.
- Abram wasn't completely wrong in his prediction, he was wrong in his plan. It was deceit, deliberate and premeditated--there was no sudden pressure upon him--
 - What do you do when your fear about what others might do to you starts to ring true?
 - Do decisions made in self-preservation-mode have good outcomes?
 - What would be a better way to make decisions when you are being threatened?
 - And when you fear something in the future that may happen, how do you prepare yourself?

life group study guide

- How do you deal with that fear appropriately? How do you plan?
- 2) Abram's fear affected his wife.
 - He lied at the risk of his wife's honor. Is Abraham's life worth more than Sarah's honor?
 - *Do you think Abram had, or was working on a next-step?*
 - *Or was he just going to leave Sarah with the Pharaoh?*
 - By the way, did Sarah have any culpability in this whole scenario? Should she have spoken up?
- 3) Abram's fear affected those he lied to.
 - We might cheer when we see that God stepped in and protected both Abraham and Sarah in both situations. He protected them even when they lied.
 - Abraham might have even expected God to step in and save them again because he did it in the first instance.
 - But ultimately, Abraham's decision to lie put Pharaoh and Abimelech in harm's way. Abraham's lie began the domino-effect that ended with an attention-getting curse from God falling on both men's households. This seems a bit selfish and mean-spirited. It is possible that when Abraham decided to lie a second time, he was aware that he was throwing Abimelech under the bus.

PHARAOH & ABILEMECH

- Interesting that the non-God followers had more integrity than Abraham in both these instances.
- Sometimes less spiritual people act less sinful than spiritual people – Pharaoh acted with more integrity than a child of God did. Pharaoh basically asked, “Why didn't you just tell me the truth?”
- And Abimelech demonstrated a dignified attitude --calmly and justly reproving the sin of the patriarch, with respect.

APPLICATION & SHARE:

- *Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by people in your past.*
- *Identify where your fear of man has been intensified by the assumptions of the world.*
- How do your “fear-based” decisions have the potential to affect your loved ones, and those who interact with you?
- What do you do with the hard reality that sometimes unbelievers act with more integrity than believers?

GOD:

- Look at the actions and words of God. What is surprising or confusing or reassuring or expected about his actions and words?
- Notice that in neither story, God doesn't prompt Abe to go back and admit his lie or face any consequences for his lying. Interesting. In fact, Abraham left both situations better off than before (with wealth!) What do you make of that? Do you think there were consequences for that sin? If so, what might those have been?

life group study guide

- What might God have been attempting to teach Abraham about his God's own character, his covenant with Abraham, or his care for Abraham and his family?
- Instead of working on Abraham in this passage, God seems to be working on those who have been lied to.
 - And notice that God holds up Abraham in Abimelech's eyes by calling Abraham a prophet.
 - Abraham gets more honor after his lie. Add that to his safe escape and his additional wealth!
 - God puts Abraham in a position to pray for and bless Abimelech.
 - What do you make of that?
 - Is that more humbling for Abimelech or Abraham?
 - How does that work on the hearts of each of those men and how does that affect the awkward relationship between them?

It appears that God was working in two different ways—one way with Abraham and another way with Pharaoh and Abimelech. Was God's purpose different for both as well as his approach?

- Pharaoh and Abimelech were being taught "fear" of the Lord in a direct way. Can you imagine the fear and respect they had for a God who would strike down with a disease? Ironically this type of fear would trump and overpower any fear that Abraham felt for mere mortals!
- On the other hand, God seemed to be developing Abraham's trust in God's covenant promise in a much more direct way. As Abraham observed God coming through for him time after time, saving him from powerful rulers, saving him from his own sinful lies, and saving him from his fear, his trust must have increased by leaps and bounds. How big God must have grown before Abraham's spiritual eyes.
 - Do these two different approaches to God require different experiences to learn?
 - What is the best way to learn the "fear of the Lord"?
 - And what is the best way to develop "trust in the Lord"?
 - Is fear more reactive and trust more proactive in our relationship with God?
 - Does fear of the Lord usually need to develop first before we grow in trusting God?
 - Is learned-trust usually a deeper, more intimate part of our relationship with God that develops over time?

OUTCOME & CONCLUSION

- How could this situation have gone down differently?
- What do you think Abraham learned about God and about himself?
- What do you think God accomplished in Egypt and in Gerar through these events?
- What greater plan might have been in motion here?

OTHER SCRIPTURE:

Psalm 56: 3-4; Deuteronomy 31: 6 & 8; Psalm 27: 1-4; Isaiah 54: 4-5; Jeremiah 17: 5-8

life group study guide