**PREPARATION**

Spend the week studying Genesis 21:8-21. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

**DETERMINE**  |  which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

**PRAY**  |  for our pastors and this week’s message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God’s Word.

**LANDING POINT**  |  Blended families are a blessing when God is honored in them.

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**Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion**

1. **Confidentiality.** What’s said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don’t talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

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**INTRODUCTION**

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

During your last session your group discussed the pressure of family finances by looking at Abraham’s encounter with the priest-king Melchizedek. You saw how Abraham honored God by putting Him first in his finances. Abraham stepped out in faith with his finances and was honored because of it.

This week you will discuss the pressure of a blended family. Blended families can be a blessing, but they can also cause stress in the home. Many believers came from or currently live in a blended family. Knowing how to handle the pressure of a blended family and honor the Lord is the key to experiencing the blessings they offer.

What is your experience with blended families? What words do you associate with that term?

In what ways do you see the blessings and stress of blended families?
Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

Family friction in Abraham’s house

Previously, you heard that God promised Abraham a son to be his heir. Ten years after Abraham’s family settled in Canaan Sarah was still unable to conceive a child. So she took matters into her own hands and had her servant, Hagar, sleep with her husband. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael.

Sarah’s plan worked, but it showed a lack of trust in God’s promises. It also caused strife in Abraham’s household, because Hagar despised Sarah for being unable to bear a child. Sarah responded in anger by mistreating Hagar, which eventually led to Hagar fleeing from her. The pressure in this blended family was palpable.

Later we revisit Abraham’s household where things have only gotten worse. The scene in Genesis 21:8-21 is a feast Abraham gave for his son, Isaac, after he had been weaned. Ishmael reacts to the whole affair by mocking it. Sarah was irate and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out.

In the midst of this conflict, God intervenes. He reiterates His promise concerning Isaac but also promises to make a great nation of Abraham’s other offspring, Ishmael. God instructs Abraham to do what Sarah says and to trust Him. The next morning Hagar and Ishmael leave Abraham and go into wilderness of Beersheba, where they come close to death. Hagar cries out to God and He responds by caring for Hagar and her son.

How would you describe the situation in Abraham’s house in your own words?

Why is it important to see that God chose to intervene in Abraham’s blended and dysfunctional family? What does this reveal about God?

Pressure points

The pressure in Abraham’s blended family created a lot of stress and conflict. This is not uncommon in blended families. A number of factors can create pressure points in them. Let’s look at three in particular: children, ex-spouses and personal regret.

First, children can be a pressure point. When two families join together, the transition can be a stressful one. Why? Because everyone has to adjust to the other. Kids need to adjust to one another, kids need to adjust to a new parent and parents need to adjust to a new family dynamic. Ishmael didn’t adjust well in a blended family, and the pressure it caused split Abraham’s family in two.

Second, ex-spouses can be a pressure point. Too often the conflict and pain of a previous relationship makes its way into another. In Abraham’s life we see how Sarah and Hagar feuded for fifteen years and the effect it had on the patriarch’s family.

Finally, personal regret can be a pressure point in blended families. Abraham and Sarah tried to find a solution to Sarah’s barrenness. But their solution caused more problems than it solved. One can imagine the regret Abraham felt for agreeing to conceive a son through Hagar and the stress it created.
LEARN [Cont.’d]

What do the pressures of a blended family reveal to you about human brokenness and sin?

Can you recall an example in your life where you witnessed one of these pressure points? Share your experience and what you learned from it?

LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

○ Listening

How do you handle the pressure of a blended family well? Let’s identify two areas that will help you handle the pressure: listening and honoring.

Often, in the middle of a life’s pressures, the hardest thing to do is listen to your spouse, children or even God. But the ability to listen is essential. When we listen, God helps us see life’s pressures and how to deal with them His way.

God gave Abraham instructions and Abraham listened. God promises to guide and instruct us through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). God speaks to you every day. He speaks to you through His Word, prayer and others. In fact, there are countless ways He can speak to you. The important question to ask is, “Am I listening to Him when He speaks?”

How would you describe someone who listens well?

What’s one change you could make this week to be a better listener in your family (or relationships)? What about in your relationship with God?

○ Honoring

The Bible tells us we should respect and honor one another, because each of us has dignity and we should see others in the same light. Honor should be the goal for every member in a blended family. You show someone honor by observing the Golden Rule: treat someone as you would want to be treated. The important question to ask here is, “Am I treating someone the way I like to be treated?”

How is the biblical concept of ‘honor’ different from what you see in the world? [see commentary notes on honor]

Give one example of someone who honors others well. What are they like? How could you imitate them in your life?
Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

- **Family Traits**

As believers we are members of a new family—the family of God. Fellow believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. This radically changes the way we relate to one another. It also changes the way we relate to nonbelievers. We want people to see the difference in us. We want them to see that the Gospel challenges us to live differently in a blended family and in relationship to others.

The following are four Family Traits that should mark every family (or group of believers). First, embrace openness together through honest living. Your family should be a safe place where everyone is allowed to express themselves without feeling judged or misunderstood. Family members also need the freedom to give and receive truth in love. Second, engage in clean conflict. Think of conflict as an opportunity to understand yourself and someone else better. The goal in conflict is not to be right, but to grow and deepen a relationship. Third, seek the best for others through selfless service. Jesus said He “did not come to be served, but to serve.” Jesus gives us the greatest example of how to live out this family trait. Serving others first will grow you in countless ways. Fourth, seek unity through mutual love. Jesus told His disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus challenges us to love without strings attached, which is contrary to the way the world works. When you look at Jesus, you see someone who loved unconditionally and indiscriminately.

How does the Gospel radically change the way we relate to others?

In what practical ways can the Family Traits help you handle the pressures of a blended family?

**PRAY**

Thank God that He works for our good in every situation, whether in a healthy or dysfunctional family. Acknowledge that the Gospel changes the way you relate to others, especially members of your family. If you live in a blended family, ask God to reveal the blessings available to you in it. And pray for a better ability to listen to the needs of others and how you might honor God and others in the way you act.

**FOLLOW UP**

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and reflect on Paul’s instructions and how they reflect a new set of family values for Christians.

Ask the group to share anything the Lord has been teaching them this week in response to this week’s discussion.
Honor.

Honor was a significant value among cultures in the biblical world. To honor someone is to acknowledge or ascribe to them value and significance. The Bible tells us we should show honor to others (Lev. 19:32; Rom. 13:1; Eph. 6:2). The concepts of honor and shame are used regularly in the New Testament. Peter exhorts his readers to “Show proper respect [or honor] to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor” (1 Pet. 2:17). Paul connects honor with love in Romans 12:10. As believers we have a new system of values based on the example of Christ who endured shame and humiliation at the cross above honor, fame or glory. [1] Above all else, believers honor God through their faith and obedience.


3. Ibid.