

**UNCORRECTED PREPUBLICATION SAMPLE
INCLUDING THE INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER ONE**

Namesake



When God
Rewrites
Your Story

A Bible Study by
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NAMESAKE: WHEN GOD REWRITES YOUR STORY

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Dedication

To the ones who named me: Mom and Dad, thank you for writing such a beautiful introduction for my story. If I ever forget to tell you how grateful I am – you have it here in writing!

To the ones who I have named: Andrew James and Katherine Juliet, I pray your stories will be filled with richest moments of closeness to Jesus. When there is pain, may He write comfort. When there is joy, be sure to write gratitude. Most of all, know that He who began a good story for you will be faithful to complete it.

I love you.



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Introduction

In the classroom I answered to the name of Jessica, but as soon as we hit the playground for recess I had an alter ego, a code name. I was Crystal.

The playground was a place of transformation. We each took on new identities in our pretend games, telling our friends to call us by new names we imagined to be more adventurous than our own. As Crystal I was beautiful and super-strong. I had long, flowing hair (in reality I sported a bowl cut for most of elementary school) and a pretend karate chop that was fierce. I could entertain at the most elegant tea party or run after bad guys and beat them up, just like in Charlie's Angels.

The picture of who I wanted so badly to be was vastly different from the little girl who always sat in the front row with the other short kids in class pictures. But calling myself by a different name produced a picture in my head that made me feel as strong and beautiful as I imagined.

The identity I created was an imaginary one. But what if there really is a new name, a new identity, for each of us—one that has been dreamed up in the



mind of God? What if your future isn't determined just by your best dream for yourself? What if you are becoming God's best dream for you—a dream that, according to Ephesians 3:20, is far better than all we can ask or even imagine? My imaginings and dreams for my life have changed and grown with the years beyond my playground dreams, and I'll bet yours have too. If we can dream big dreams for ourselves, imagine how great God's dreams for us must be!

The time we'll spend together in this study will help you learn more about God's dreams for your life and how He wants to make them reality.

Namesake is intended to help you discover the transformational power of God through the stories of biblical characters who came to know God and whose lives and names were never the same. Over the next six weeks, you will explore the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Naomi, Daniel, Peter, and an unnamed woman. You and a group of friends will see that God wants to be just as intimately involved in your stories, offering each of you an identity that shines with the purpose for which you were created—to know Him through His Son, Jesus, and to become more and more like Him, bringing God glory for His name's sake.

In addition to discovering how God works to bring this transformation in our lives, you also will explore how God has revealed Himself to us in Scripture—and how He desires to reveal Himself personally to each and every one of us. He is a God who reveals and transforms. My prayer is that you will come to know Him in a deeper and more personal way as you invite Him to rewrite your own life story, allowing His dreams for you to come true.

Transformation and Revelation

Each week in your reading you'll find the themes of transformation and revelation. Let's take a closer look at these themes and what they have to do with God's dreams for us.

Transformation is true and remarkable change. It's what happens when something is no longer its old self but becomes something else. All of the people we will encounter in our journey together experienced stories of transformation at God's hands.

God is not only great at creating (from scratch); He's great at transforming. When His creation goes astray, He doesn't walk away or shake His head in disgust. He rolls up His sleeves and gets down to the business of transformation. He nudges, whispers, shouts, pulls, and prompts until we get the picture of what He desires for us to become. And then He gently helps us get there.

Through transformation God declares: "Behold I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Revelation is more than just the name of the last book of the Bible. Revelation is the noun that happens when you "reveal" something. Revelation is what God does from beginning to end in Scripture. He reveals Himself and His character to His people again and again, ultimately coming to us in human form through Jesus so that we might truly know Him and how He feels about us.

When we know who He is, our understanding of who we are and what we



are about shifts dramatically. All true transformation starts with revelation, not about ourselves, but about the One who has the power to show us who we are and change us into who we are called to be.

Through revelation God declares: “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14).

Throughout our study we’ll be bouncing back and forth between the questions “Who is God?” and “Who is God calling me to become?” These questions are so related that the attempt to answer one will always lead us to ask the other. The six stories from the Bible we will study together will help illustrate six different times that God stepped into lives that needed changing and announced His presence and power with grace and truth.

I hope you’ll be listening for the echoes of your own story each week. Exploring our identities is a lifelong process. At every stage and in every experience of life we are led to ask again: “Who is God, and who is He calling me to become?”

Getting Started

For each week of our study there are five readings. The first four explore the theme of transformation found in the featured Bible story, and the last one focuses on the theme of God’s revelation of Himself. Each of these readings includes the following segments:

Read God’s Word

A portion of the Bible story for the week, occasionally with other Scripture readings.

Reflect and Respond	A guided reflection and study of the Scripture with space for recording your responses.
Pray About It	A prayer suggestion and/or sample prayer to guide you into a personal time of prayer.
Act on It	Ideas to help you act on what you have read.

You will be able to complete each reading in about 20–30 minutes. (You will need a pen or pencil and your Bible.) Completing these readings each week will help to prepare you for the discussion and activities of the group session.

Once a week you will gather with your group to watch a video in which I share additional insights into the stories and their application for our lives. I encourage you to discuss what you're learning and to share how God is working to transform your own stories. You will find that sharing with one another will enable you to recognize God's activity in your lives even more clearly and help you to encourage and pray for one another.

Before you begin this journey, give God permission to work on your heart and your life. Offer yourself to Him and express your desire to live into the new story He is writing for you. May God richly bless you as you study His Word and discover the wonderful things that happen when God rewrites your story!

Blessings,

Jessica





Week 1 Abraham and Sarah

Every Name Tells a Story: Little Mike

A name can function as a password, a key that allows you access to its owner. When I visit people in the hospital, that key can unlock doors or leave me standing out in the cold.

When I walk into a hospital, the first person I meet is usually the receptionist at the information desk. My response to the question “Can I help you?” is generally to offer a name. “I’m here to visit Mike Drummond,” I said on a recent hospital visit. The woman paused, glanced at her computer screen, and smiled at me: “I’m sorry, we don’t have a patient here by that name.”

I’m used to this game. Because of privacy laws, hospitals won’t give access to the room number of a patient unless the visitor knows the exact legal name entered in the records. So I tried again. “OK, how about Michael Drummond?” Same pause, back to the computer, and then another smiling response: “There’s no one admitted in this hospital by that name.” By this time I was beginning





to get frustrated, but a few well-placed cell phone inquiries to mutual friends brought me back to the desk with my password ready: “THOMAS Drummond!” I said triumphantly. Success! This time I was rewarded with a room number and directions to the elevators.

Mike lay in his hospital bed looking a bit weak but cheerful. Even cancer couldn’t put a damper on his hearty personality. After a few inquiries about how he was feeling and when he might get to go home, I got to the question stirring my curiosity: “Mike, how is it that I’ve known you all this time and had no idea your name was really Thomas?” The story he shared was worth the trip and the delay in the lobby.

Thomas Phillip Drummond Jr. was the first child born to a wonderful mother and father. His dad, Tom, was proud to share his name with his little boy. The family lived in Illinois when he arrived but soon packed up and moved back home to be close to his mother’s family. And by close I mean close: they moved to a street where his mom’s two sisters were their next door neighbors on either side. Three houses in a row occupied by three sisters and their families—a chaotic festivity of cousins running back and forth through each other’s backyards.

There was one little wrinkle in the happy family tree, however. It turned out that little Thomas Jr.’s aunts had not been consulted on the choice of his name. They protested because this first-born grandson wasn’t named after their father, his grandfather on his mother’s side. Thomas Jr.’s parents insisted he keep the name he had received on his birth certificate, but the aunts would hear none of it. They began calling him after his grandfather anyway—Francis Marion Jennings, who went by Mike because he was too burly a guy to go by either Francis or Marion.

Thomas Jr.'s parents tried to stick to their guns but were overpowered as the whole family insisted on calling him Little Mike. Eventually even his parents gave in, and Little Mike it was. Mike claims that for the first three years of his life he thought his first name was all one word: Littlemike. It was a long time before he discovered his given name wasn't Mike at all.

Mike is honored to share the names of his father and grandfather. They were both honorable men, he says—capable, loving, strong, and family-oriented. He knows he couldn't go wrong being named after two wonderful men. He's proud to be their namesake.

A namesake is usually someone given the name of a predecessor in hopes that he or she will grow up and emulate that person in some way. Parents hope their little girl or boy will adopt his or her namesake's traits as the child is called by that name. Little Mike eventually dropped the "Little" and became just Mike. He hopes that he carries that name in a way that would make his grandfather proud. He also has great hopes and dreams for his own son and namesake, Thomas Philip Drummond III, who goes by Phil.

The word *Christian* bears, at its heart, the name of Christ. When that name is bestowed on us, God hopes and dreams that we will grow to favor His son, to be like Him in all that we are and do. Becoming Jesus' namesake is a complicated, lifelong process of transformation that begins with the simple act of trusting Him.

Abram and Sarai discovered that the God they encountered had such big dreams for them that their entire lives were about to change, including their names. Their identities were so altered by God that their old names simply didn't fit the persons they were becoming. Their new names became a key to a new life,



a password of sorts, given by a God who knew them even better than they knew themselves. As we explore their story this week, we will begin our own journey of change. Who are we? Who is God calling us to become? The answers are in the hands of the One who hopes to become our Namesake.

Day 1: What's in a Name?

Read God's Word

¹The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

²"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

Genesis 12:1-4

Reflect and Respond

I've always been intrigued by the stories behind people's names. When someone is introduced to me by name, I often find myself on a scavenger hunt of questions to find out if it has an anecdote attached to it. Harper—Is that a family name? Kennedy—Are your parents politically inclined? Julia—Did your mother watch a lot of romantic comedies? Boston—Is that city a special place for your family? I'm truly curious about names, but sometimes people look at me as if I'm a little too nosy! Most people love to tell you their story. Sometimes they have a clear namesake—someone whose name was passed down to them in hopes they would carry on some characteristic or attribute. Other times parents seem to have chosen a name at random. I've known more than one couple who arrived at the hospital for the birth of their child without knowing what they would write on the birth certificate. One couple even put their list up on the wall of the delivery room and let the medical staff vote!

One set of parents I know used to try out potential names for their unborn children by attaching titles to the end to see how they sounded. Piper Johnson, Attorney at Law. Reginald Johnson, M.D. If the name seemed to fit the dream they had for their child, they would put it on their short list. They pictured what kind of life they wanted their child to have, and then they picked a name that seemed to fit the person they imagined the child becoming.

Those living in the time when the Bible was written definitely invested a lot of effort and thought when they named their children. Names were given to tell a story. A name could carry in it the story of the circumstances surrounding your



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birth or the weight of the hopes and dreams your parents had for you. Introduce yourself by name and you could be introducing the character or blessings your parents hoped you would embody as you grew. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. puts it this way: "In Israel, names were not just labels of individuality but descriptions of inner character...presumed to influence the person's conduct."¹

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20. When Samuel is named in verse 20, what idea does his mother try to convey with his naming?

Read Genesis 29:31-35; 30:1-12. In just a word or two, tell what you learn about the reasons given for naming each of these great-grandchildren of Abraham and Sarah:

Reuben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

Dan

Naphtali


Gad

Asher

Abraham and Sarah themselves—named Abram and Sarai at birth—were certainly born to parents trying to tell a story with their children’s names.

Baby Abram was given a name that seems odd to us now. Not many of us would look at a tiny newborn, all squinty-eyed with tiny fingernails and eyelashes, and pronounce him “Exalted Father,” which is what Abram’s name literally meant in Hebrew. To us, it seems strange to gaze at a newborn and call him “Father,” but to his parents it represented all of their greatest dreams for him.





Abram's parents wanted his name to tell the story of his future life as one filled with prosperity, and for them that meant growing up to be a father with lots of children. Without currency or stocks or investments, the measure of permanent wealth in that day was carried in your land and your children. So for baby Abram's parents to wish him a houseful of children who would exalt his name—calling him “exalted father”—they were wishing a life of abundance on their baby boy in the same way we might, with a hopeful tone, name a little boy “Rich.”

On the day of her birth, little Exalted Father's future wife was given a name that's a bit easier for us to understand. Her parents looked at their little pink bundle of joy and named her something we might call our own little girls today. They called her “Princess,” a term of endearment that we might use as a nickname today. My Little Princess, they said, and that, in Hebrew, came out Sarai.

The little Princess grew up to marry the Exalted Father, and even more strange than Abram's name must have sounded at birth (A baby called “Father”? Did they call him “Dad” for short?) was the irony that he grew up—grew old, even—and had no children at all. It must have been awkward to introduce himself to someone as Exalted Father and have to answer the inevitable question: So... how many children do you have? The exalted father was the father of none. He and his wife, Sarai, had been married long enough that their friends had children—grandchildren even. But Abram and Sarai were childless. And in a culture that placed such high value on the number of offspring one had, this was a devastating blow.

Abram is seventy-five years old when we are first introduced to him and his wife in Scripture (Genesis 12:4). And Sarai—well, let's just say she's no spring

chick either. A lady never tells her age, but she had always counted on looking young by standing next to her husband—a man about ten years her senior. But when that man is now seventy-five, Sarai is starting to look a little senior herself.

It's to these two card-carrying members of AARP that God appears and begins to make outlandish and epic promises. From their first meeting in Genesis 12 and again in Genesis 17—where, by the way, we learn that Abram is ninety-nine years old—God promises that they will become the parents of many offspring—from a great nation in Chapter 12 to many nations in Chapter 17. And in Chapter 15, God gives Abram a powerful visual to go with this promise.

Read Genesis 15:5. God promised Abram that his offspring would number like _____.

In the time of Abram and Sarai, the stars were an even more meaningful spectacle than they are to us today. Without electricity or pollution, there were even more stars visible in the night sky, and they spent more time gazing at them because there was little else to see after dark. The stars were a beautiful gallery of art, a map to guide their way, and a great and magnificent mystery. When God promised Abram and Sarai offspring as numerous as the stars in Genesis 15:5, it was a mind-blowing prospect.



Read Isaiah 40:26. What does it say about the names of the stars and God's relationship to them?

What is your reaction to a God who cares about us so intimately and personally? How does it feel to know God formed you and knows you by name?

The promise of God's blessings in Abram and Sarai's lives would be so overwhelming that they would be utterly transformed by God. An encounter with the living God means that one's life will never be the same again. For our two aging friends, their very identities would be so altered that it would be like two new persons had emerged. Everything would be different.

Even their names would have to be changed.

God had plans for Abram and Sarai that were far beyond anything they dreamed of. What do these verses say about the plans God has for us?

Jeremiah 29:11

Ephesians 3:20

When your parents chose your name, they likely had a dream in mind. That name had a ring to it when they first spoke it over you—the ring of their hopes and longings for the kind of life they wanted to see you live, the kind of person they wanted to see you become. They may have been picturing your namesake when they gave it to you—someone who gave the name a sense of beauty, integrity, or power for them. Eventually, though, that name became truly your own. It became synonymous with you: with your personality and character. When people speak or think of your name, they picture your face, your heart, their memories of your gifts or your spirit, and your temperament.

As powerful as parents' dreams are for their children, God's dreams for us are even more influential. They are the prevailing story spoken over our lives as we grow and become the person God created us to be. Although Abraham and Sarah would forever be connected to the families that named them, they weren't afraid to step out of the path they were expected to follow and into the plans of God. When we begin to ask questions about God's dreams for us, we may find an even greater story than the one we began the day the ink dried on our birth certificate. The God who gives new birth, always has new plans for us, plans for a journey beyond anything we ever dared to dream.



Pray About It

Ask God to open your heart to the lessons He has to teach you in this study. What are you hoping to learn or gain? Share with Him your expectations, needs, and apprehensions in prayer.

Act on It

- **Does your name tell a story? Do you know the reasons your parents gave you the name that they did? Write a brief description here:**
- **Look up your name in a baby name book or on a baby name website, and write the meaning here:**
- **Look up the names of other family members and write the meanings here:**

- Names are great conversation starters. Just for fun, ask some friends this week if there is a story behind their name. And if you are around anyone wearing a nametag or introducing themselves by name, ask them where their name originated. You may be surprised by how much you can learn about someone from the story of his or her name.

Record any interesting findings here:

Day 2: Small Changes, Big Impact

Read God's Word

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ²I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. . . .



¹⁵God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

¹⁷Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

¹⁹Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” ²²When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

Genesis 17:1-5; 15-22

Reflect and Respond

Jeff was one of my favorite speakers to invite to special events for teenagers during the years when I was a youth minister. He always held their attention, and he always had them crying by the end—one of the unspoken standards for success in youth ministry. Jeff’s powerful testimony began in his own teenage years, when he had been defiant and wild, rejecting his parents’ Christian views

and filling his life with parties, alcohol, and rebellion. At the pinnacle of his story, Jeff left a party under the influence of alcohol and tried to drive home. When his best friend stood in his way, intending to stop him from driving drunk, Jeff didn't see him in his rearview mirror and accidentally backed over his friend, killing him instantly. The wake-up call was immediate. In the midst of grief, confession, and repentance, Jeff gave his life to Jesus and pledged to go into ministry, telling his story to prevent others from going down the wrong path.

Our teens loved the drama of Jeff's testimony and the real transformation they saw in him. Each time he told his story, a handful of them realized they were on the same path of rebellion and made a dramatic turn with their own lives.

But then there were the rest of the kids—regular church-goers living less-than-dramatic lives. Many of them had already given their lives to Christ. Most could not identify with the remarkable circumstances of Jeff's life. When asked to tell about how God was working in their lives, some of them lamented, "I don't really have a testimony. God hasn't done much in my life compared to Jeff." They didn't realize they were being daily transformed in little ways, or that it was important to expect God's help with the smallest things. Turning their temptations toward greed, lust, selfishness and materialism (to name a few) over to God, bit by bit, was forming a dramatically different future for them. They were becoming new and different people, but sometimes the alterations were almost too small to see.

In light of the big changes God wanted to make in Abram and Sarai's lives, the changes in their names seem so small. In fact, it was just one Hebrew letter each. But when God makes changes, the tiniest adjustment can communicate big things for us, our futures, and those whose lives we will impact.



Abram and Sarai each received the same letter as an addition to their names. In Hebrew the letter is called *Hey* (Similar to our *H*).

In Hebrew, letters have significance beyond just a pronounced sound. Each character of the Hebrew alphabet is infused with meaning. The letter *Hey*, for example, also signifies the number five, since it's the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. *Hey* sometimes represents the divine breath, revelation, and light. In some Jewish teachings, *Hey* is a picture of the presence of God within the human heart. Adding *Hey* at the very end of a Hebrew noun gives the word a feminine character, which can metaphorically mean the word has become "fruitful" or reproductive.

What did the addition of that one letter mean to Abraham and Sarah? It shifted the meaning of their names to fit God's plan for their future. Abram, which means "The Exalted Father," was now Abraham, which means "The Father of Many Nations."

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."

Genesis 17:4-6

The slight change in the spelling of Sarai's name to Sarah changed the meaning from a simple term of endearment such as "our little princess" to an actual, royal title. Sarah means "A True Princess," one who will be the mother of kings

and princes.

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Genesis 17:15-16

Hearing their new names spoken by God must have been an awesome moment, one where God painted a clear picture of the future He had in mind for them. That tiny little letter painted a picture of a God who wanted to dwell in their hearts, making His presence as accessible as their next breath. A picture of a new life that was fruitful and reproductive, infused with hope of a family that they had dreamed of for years and a God who would surround and bless them.

Take a moment to mark the significance of this simple yet profound name change for Abraham and Sarah. Record the meaning of each name in the chart below.

Old Name	Meaning	New Name	Meaning
Abram		Abraham	
Sarai		Sarah	



How do you think these name changes might have affected Abraham and Sarah?

Too often we underestimate the value of small changes God makes in our lives. What looks like one little letter to us meant the world to Abraham and Sarah. Dramatic testimonies are inspiring, but if we miss the small changes God is making, we will miss the big picture He's painting for a big future.

"God works powerfully, but for the most part gently and gradually."

—John Newton, writer of the lyrics to "Amazing Grace"

When I think about the changes God wants to make in our lives, I think of Nicodemus. I've always been fascinated by the story of Nicodemus, a man who had to sneak around to meet with Jesus in the middle of the night. He brings to mind what my parents would tell me when they reminded me of my curfew as a teenager: "Nothing good happens after midnight!" Nicodemus intrigues me because the mysterious encounter he has after dark turned out to be something good after all—something that changed his entire life.


Nicodemus's story is told in John 3:1-21. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a religious leader in his day, known for living life on the "up and up." No sneaking around for him! But because the Pharisees were a group of Jesus' most ardent critics and enemies, Nicodemus snuck in to talk to Jesus at night. He wanted to hide his interest in Jesus and his teaching, an interest that would have been looked upon unfavorably by the other Pharisees and their followers.

Read John 3. Does Nicodemus profess faith in Jesus' words? Do we know from this passage about changes that Nicodemus felt internally or made in his life?

Now read John 19:38-42. What do we find Nicodemus doing here in the light of day, in the middle of a crowd?

What do you think brought about the changes we see in Nicodemus from chapter 3 to chapter 19—changes that led Nicodemus to make a public statement with his actions toward Jesus?





Nicodemus' faith developed in a way that many Christians can identify with. First, he was curious about Jesus but hesitant to do anything about it. He probably watched believers around him carefully, wondering what made their lives so different from the rule-bound Pharisees he spent his time with. When he could no longer contain his curiosity, he began to talk privately to Jesus. His faith was hidden from the light of day for a while so that no one could question or make fun of him. Then he finally went public with his convictions. The crucifixion of Jesus meant that Nicodemus couldn't contain or hide his faith any longer. He wanted to do something about it.

Going public with our faith involves a great deal more than attending church or wearing a Christian T-shirt. It means showing the characteristics of Christ in our lives that match the change going on in our hearts. Public faith affects the way we treat others, the way we handle anger or disappointment, and the way we choose to sacrifice things that would benefit us for the good of others.

The outward traits of someone who has been transformed by God are often called the fruit of the Spirit. These nine traits may seem like small characteristics, but when they grow in a life with God's help, they shine powerfully. The fruit of the Spirit grows as you live your life surrendered to God's Holy Spirit.

Look up Galatians 5:22 and list the fruit of the Spirit below.

1. _____

2. _____


3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Is there one or more of these nine characteristics that is more evident in your life? Circle the characteristics above that you can see growing in you.

Is there a characteristic you would like to be more evident in your life? Put a checkmark beside it.

Are there people who come to mind whose lives are like living produce sections, growing the fruit of the Spirit in obvious ways? Write their name or initials next to the characteristics you see evident in them.





I love hearing powerful stories of people whose lives were changed by Jesus in a big way. One friend of mine was lost in addiction, hit rock bottom, and found forgiveness and sobriety. A woman I know was an angry, bitter person, hurting those around her without a second thought. When she met Jesus, those in her family and workplace saw an instant and dramatic change in her. One man lived a life shaped by greed, ignoring his close relationships so that he could work to attain more and more things. When God changed his heart, he became one of the most generous people I know, giving away almost everything he had and then working for more just so he could share it with others.

But for every person with a big testimony, marked with a clear and instantaneous before-and-after story, I know dozens who can testify to tiny, incremental change. Change like this is almost imperceptible if you try to catch it happening, like trying to watch a tendril of ivy wind its way up a brick wall. Stare at it and it never seems to change. Look at it every few days, or every few weeks, and you'll see its progress. Check on it once a year and you'll see it take over the whole wall. I think God designed it this way. He knew we would need constant reminders, repeated help, and consistent attention to our relationship with Him. If everything changed in an instant, we wouldn't need the help He offers on a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute basis. With His patient attention, though, the changes in us will become apparent over time. Our faith will bloom.

Do you know the story of someone who was changed in a big way by God—someone who has a dramatic testimony of her or his life being changed after meeting Jesus? Write the person’s name and a sentence or two describing her or his story here.

Do you know someone who experienced a smaller change in her or his life with God’s help? Write the person’s name and a sentence or two describing those changes here.

What are some changes you’ve experienced over the years with God’s help—whether small or large? How are you different now than five to ten years ago?

It takes time to become the persons God wants us to be. I’m thankful to have a lifetime to practice listening for God’s voice and following His directions. Abraham and Sarah’s story is encouraging because it shows us how little changes add up over time. And it reveals the heart of a patient God, who never gives up on His dreams for us.





Pray About It

What changes in your own life and character has God helped you to make? Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for His help in transforming you.

What changes still need to be made in your own heart and actions? Lift these desired changes to God and place them in His hands. Tell Him that you are open to any changes He wants to make in you.

Read Ephesians 1:6 out loud. Thank God for being willing and able to complete the good work He has already begun in you.

Act on It

- Think of someone who is close to you (family member or friend) in whom you have noticed changes over time—whether small or large. Take a moment today to tell them or write them a note about how proud you are of their transformation.
- Find the Hebrew equivalent of your name at www.my-hebrew-name.com. (Note: If you have an unusual name, there may not be an equivalent listed on this site. If you do find a Hebrew name, be sure to click on it to see it spelled out in Hebrew.)

Write what you find here:

- If you'd like to learn more about the Hebrew alphabet, use this link and click on individual letters to learn their characters and meanings: http://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/



Day 3: Promises, Promises

Read God's Word

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ²I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Genesis 17:1-8

Reflect and Respond

At nine years old I was already a bit jaded. I understood that television commercials promised things their products would never be able to deliver. I felt sure that it was false advertising when my grandmother guaranteed that eating

all my vegetables would make me grow up to have big muscles. And I knew that grownups didn't always keep their promises. By the end of elementary school I had witnessed my own parents' divorce and their remarriages, which were already beginning to crumble. Step-parents, step-brothers and -sisters, and step-grandparents were impermanent stars in confused and fading family constellations. People came into my life making vows to one another and to me, but I was learning quickly that they often didn't hold up their end of those promises. Before I ever hit puberty I learned to look with caution when a grown-up made a promise to stay forever.

My ninth year was also the summer that I stood on a hillside at a Christian camp in the Texas hill country, contemplating the promises of God. My counselors taught me about Jesus' love for me, about His invitation to a life-long, life-changing relationship, and about His faithfulness. It was the faithfulness part I questioned. If grown-ups couldn't keep their promises to each other or to me, how could I trust this God with my heart? How did I know He would keep His word? Would God love me forever, or would He bail when things got tough? Somehow during that week the hardness of my little third grade heart began to melt. I wanted so badly for someone to love me and stay forever. So I took a chance and said yes to Jesus.



Read the following Scripture passages. What does each say about God's promises?

Numbers 23:19

Joshua 23:14

John 14:1-2

2 Peter 3:9

Abraham and Sarah didn't have much experience with a God who made promises and kept them. The religion of their families had been one of polytheism—the belief in many gods. In this practice, their families would've had a shrine or altar with multiple idols dedicated to different gods. When they wanted something, they would pick an idol that specialized in that area (for example: a god or goddess of fertility, war, healing, or harvest) and make sacrifices and promises to win that god's approval and favor. Worshipping at the family altar

was often about what they wanted and how to manipulate their false gods to get it, rather than responding to a God who wanted something from them.

This God, however, was clearly different than any they had ever heard of before. He sought them out and made contact instead of waiting for them to come to Him. He made promises to them that were about His will instead of them making promises and sacrifices to Him in hopes that He would do their will. Most of all, He was real. And powerful. And loving. And more than capable of fulfilling every promise that He made.

Reread today's Scripture passage (p. 38) and circle each time that God says, "I will."

How many times did you find "I will" in these verses?

Is this phrase in first, second, or third person?

Is this phrase in past, present or future tense?



What conclusion can you make based on these answers?

Dr. Sandra Richter sums up the promises God makes to His people in three words: People, Place and Presence.²

First, God promised them a People.

Reread Genesis 17:6, 15-16 and fill in the blanks below:

“I will make you very _____; I will make _____ of you, and kings will come from you.”

Genesis 17:6

“As for Sarai your wife, ...I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of _____; kings of _____ will come from her.”

Genesis 17:15-16

This promise might be the one that caught Abraham and Sarah’s attention because it addressed a long-awaited desire of their hearts: a family. God promised not only a little bundle they could call their own, but also a family that would be as plentiful as the stars in the heavens or the grains of sand on the shore. This would result not only in a little nuclear family, but also in a people, one that

would be blessed by God and share His blessings with the world. The “people” promised here were the beginning of a family line. God’s chosen people. God promised that He would bring blessings to Abraham’s offspring.

Read Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 9:8. Who is included now in this list of Abraham’s descendants?

What does it mean to be part of this line?

Read John 1:12-13, 1 John 3:1-2, and Romans 8:15-17. Describe what it means personally to know you’re part of this covenant of amazing promises.

The second thing God promised them was a Place—a land that would hold all these future nations, a place they could call home for generations to come.

Reread Genesis 17:8 and fill in the blanks below:

“The whole _____ of _____, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you.”



It would be a land that would be amazingly beautiful and fruitful and belong to their family. Remember that permanent wealth wasn't determined by currency in the bank but by many children and ownership of land to pass down through the generations. These two promises alone were the equivalent of winning the lottery a million times over.

Third, and best of all, God promised them a Presence—His presence.

Reread Genesis 17:7-8 and fill in the blanks below:

"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be _____ and the God of your descendants after you. . . . I will be _____."

He promised to be with them and to be their God—to love and take care of them.

God promised Abraham and Sarah three things: the two greatest desires of their hearts—people and place—and a third thing they hadn't even imagined they could desire, because the presence of a God who loved and cared and guided them through life was unheard of. The greatest promise of all was that He would be with them, establishing a covenant (v. 7) to be their God and the God of their descendants. This third promise was worth more than the others combined—God's presence with them. The greatest promise of all is God's presence, His commitment to walk with us as His children.

What do you learn from the following verses about God's presence?

Psalms 16:11

Psalms 41:12

Acts 17:28

While Abraham and Sarah were used to making their own promises to idols that were false and powerless, they suddenly found themselves in the presence of the God who was powerful and true—who took ownership of the outcome and made clear where the power behind these great works would come from by over and over again using the words “I will” to describe His intentions to fulfill this new covenant.

This God is clearly not one to be manipulated and controlled like an idol, but is the One in control. The promises made are to fulfill His will and purpose. As for an itinerary or timeline, God is not very exact on that point. He just points to



a time in the future and says, “I will.” I’m sure Abraham and Sarah were thrilled at the prospect of such great gifts arriving in their lives, while also wishing for a little more detail about how and when they would arrive! I can identify. I often wish God would spell out details for me about my future instead of expecting me to trust Him.

Letting God be in control is a hard thing, but the fulfillment of His promises is so much better than looking to our own devices or fruitlessly worshipping the false gods of this world to try to get our desires met in our own timing. God’s continual promise, “I will,” means that the responsibility and power for our lives lies in His hands, not our own.

If you’ll look back closely at your own story, I’m sure you’ll find it is marked by so many gifts that have already arrived: People who have brought you laughter, places that you’ve treasured, and most of all a Presence—His Presence.

How has God brought blessings into your life in the following three categories?

1) People who’ve brought joy to your life:

2) Places you’ve treasured:

3) The Presence of God with you in good times and bad:

If you've ever wondered who will love you unconditionally, who will walk beside you and never leave you, who will give you a place to belong with a people of faith, or who will offer His presence when you need it most, listen to the echo of these words in Genesis 17: I will. I will. I will. God doesn't take these promises lightly, and neither should we. Abraham and Sarah discovered that God could and would always keep His promises. I'm so thankful that I turned my nine-year-old heart over to Him. No matter my actions or behavior, He has been faithful in loving me ever since. And He always will. He will do the same for you.

Pray About It

Take a moment to thank God for the blessings in your life of People, Place, and Presence.

Now look to your future. What are the circumstances or relationships that concern you? Where do you need to trust God's provision?



Make a list of your concerns below:

Pray a prayer, placing your concerns in God's hands and asking Him to handle them. Believe God's promise: "I will."

Act on It

- Think back on your own journey of faith with Christ. Who are the people God has placed in your path who have made an impact in your life? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for each of these "gifts" God has blessed you with. If you feel led, call or send a "thank you" note to each one.
- Make a conscious decision this week to look for signs of God's presence around you. Keep a small notebook or file on your computer or phone where you can record the ways you sensed or saw God at work around you. Share these with your group.

Day 4: Waiting on God

Read God's Word

¹The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

⁷Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.



⁹*“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.*

“There, in the tent, ” he said.

¹⁰*Then the LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”*

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

¹³*Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”*

¹⁵*Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.”*

But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

Genesis 18:1-15

Reflect and Respond

Hurry up and wait! That phrase or something like it may have echoed in Abraham and Sarah's minds. They received awesome promises from God but no timeline about when they would be fulfilled. They learned quickly that trusting this God and His promises meant a lot of waiting, hoping, and praying.

There were a few years when my life felt like one big waiting room. I spent so much time waiting in doctors' offices that I had read and re-read the same magazines, studied the fading pictures on their walls, and knew the receptionists' names by heart. My heart's desire was to become a mom, but my body just wasn't cooperating. After a couple of years in the waiting room of my regular Ob-gyn, I moved on to the bigger and more expensive waiting room of a specialist, and a lab, and an operating room, and lots of other places where it seemed like all I could do was...wait.

It has always seemed strange to me that those who are in the care of a doctor are called "patients." It was so hard to have any patience with a process in which I had no control. As we slowly unraveled the reasons for our struggle with infertility, more and more doctors prescribed treatments and medications and advised that I continue to wait in their care. I may have been their patient, but I didn't feel very patient.

After what seemed like an eternity of trying, the joy of finding out we were expecting our first baby was quickly eclipsed by the devastating news that I had miscarried. That led to more tests, more doctors' visits, and more practice being an impatient patient while I waited for answers and results. When our hearts



desire something so deeply that we can't think of or want anything else, the pain of waiting can be excruciating. I had been trusting God with my life since I was a child, but this was the toughest hurdle yet. When things looked and felt worse than ever, did God still have my hopes and dreams on His to-do list? It was hard to face the answer of "wait and see."

Even if it's not for life-changing news or results, waiting is one of the hardest things we do in life. We don't even like the annoyance of waiting in line at the store, or waiting for our food at a restaurant. Learning to wait well is important, because we'll always be waiting for something. Once we have what we've waited for, it seems to lead to waiting for something else. Hunger is a great example. Once we satisfy it, it's only a matter of time before it returns. We can't expect one meal a day to keep us full! Because our lives are filled with waiting, each of us has to make up our mind: Will I be discontent because I don't yet have what I want, or can I find contentment along the way with God's help? What will I learn in my time of waiting? Am I willing to listen for God as I wait?

What are some things you've had to wait for in your life? How did it feel to wait?

Abraham and Sarah's lives were full of waiting for their longing for a child to be fulfilled. Long after they had hoped to be grandparents, they were still wait-

ing for the baby that God had promised twenty-five years earlier. That's what I call a long time to be expecting!

From their perspective it must have seemed that their prayers were getting harder and harder to answer because of their age, but to a God who loves a challenge, the timing was just right. The more difficult something is to make happen, the more God enjoys rolling up His sleeves and impressing the world by doing what only He can accomplish. When God makes the impossible happen, we can't deny that He's the one behind the results.

Read these stories of others in the Bible who waited. What were they waiting for? What do you learn from each of their stories?

Genesis 8:6-12

1 Samuel 1:1-22

Luke 2:25-35



Often we find that something powerful has happened within us while we were waiting. Waiting for the blessing can often be part of the blessing itself, since we have to rely on God in new and unexpected ways.

An old hymn talks about the learning and changing process that can happen in us while we're waiting.

Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way.

Thou art the potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, after thy will.

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Adelaide A. Pollard, 1907³

Waiting may be one of the few times in life when we are forced to be still long enough for God to do some of His most important work in us, molding us into who He wants us to become. Waiting is a struggle because we're so used to the illusion that we control our lives by planning and acting on our plans. We believe that we are the ones who make things happen. Waiting strips us of that illusion and forces us to acknowledge the God who is in control and our need for Him.

In the Old Testament there are several words that can be translated to the English word "wait." The most commonly used Hebrew word translated "wait" is *qavah*. It literally means "to bind together" (by twisting strands as in making a


rope), or to “look patiently,” “tarry or wait,” “hope, expect, look eagerly.”

Look up the following Scriptures about waiting: Psalm 27:14, Psalm 130:5-7, and Isaiah 40:31. All three use the word *qavah* for wait. Choose your favorite and write it below:

I think this word is my favorite of all the Hebrew words that mean “wait,” because of the picture of binding things together. God used my time of waiting to bind my marriage and other relationships closer together, and to bind my heart closer to His than it had ever been. I never would have chosen the path that we went down over those years. The pain of waiting and loss brings a twinge of tenderness in my heart even years later. But I recognize now that my practice being a patient actually strengthened my patience more than I could have imagined at the time. Those years gave me a deep appreciation for Abraham and Sarah. When I read their story of waiting, I see between the lines their years of discouragement and anguish, but also their growth in trust and hope in God. I know all too well the longing they experienced for the gift they wanted to hold in their arms. But I also know they received countless gifts while holding their empty arms out to God.

Read the following verses: Psalm 40:1, Psalm 119:114, Lamentations 3:25, Isaiah 25:9. What can we learn about God as we trust Him in our waiting?





Waiting means to trust that God is good, even when we can't see it in the ways we wanted or expected. Waiting means seeking God's help and comfort in prayer and worship when we can't find it in our material world. Waiting means asking God to change us instead of expecting to change God. Abraham and Sarah had different hearts, a different marriage, and a different outlook on God's promises after twenty-five years of waiting. I wonder: what will change in us while we are waiting?

How has waiting changed you or your relationship with God?

Trusting in God doesn't mean that our prayers will be instantaneously answered, as if God were some cosmic vending machine ready to dispense our wishes and wants. Instead, it means that our waiting and longing can become a tool that transforms us rather than an obstacle to happiness and fulfillment. Choosing to trust God's goodness means that we turn our waiting over to Him. When we do, moments when we impatiently thought nothing was happening at all can become some of the most productive, transformational times of our lives.

Pray About It

Psalm 46:10 tells us to “be still, and know that I am God.” Spend some time waiting on God in prayer. This isn’t time to ask God for anything or even to talk to Him; it’s just a time to wait and be quiet. Set aside a time and place where you can be silent. Set a timer for five or ten minutes if it helps. Sit still and quiet the thoughts of your mind. If a thought comes to your mind, let it float away like a leaf floats downstream and return your mind to quiet.

This is sometimes difficult the first time or the first few times you try it. Our minds naturally have a lot of thoughts rumbling around, and they pop up quickly when we’re quiet. The discipline of quieting your mind and sitting still is one that will carry over to other times. The peace you receive in this waiting time will seep out into the other areas of your life.

Act on It

- Our experience of waiting has changed drastically with the arrival of cell phones. Many people use their “waiting” time in line, in a doctor’s office, and even in traffic to make calls or text messages or check their email and Facebook on their phones. This week, take a day where you intentionally wait in “electronic silence.” Look around the doctor’s office and observe those around you. Start a conversation with those in line at the grocery store. Observe the people and things around you and ask God to teach you something. What can you learn from your waiting time this week?



- Start a Waiting Journal. Keep a list of the times you wait and how you feel. Where is your attention as you wait for little things? What is your attitude? How about the big things in your life? Look back and remember waiting for life-events and how it felt to wait. Write a paragraph praising God for who He is and what He provides while you wait on Him. Look ahead to things you are waiting for now and write about how God is working in your life as you wait.

Day 5: Revelation—To Call on the Name of God

Read God's Word

¹Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

³They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

⁵But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.

Genesis 11:1-8

¹The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

²"I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

Genesis 12:1-9



Reflect and Respond

There are certain kinds of change I resist with my whole being. I don't like it when friends move away. I would rather sing my heart out to my favorite songs in worship than learn new songs or new styles of music. I don't want to be forced to change shampoos because mine went off the market or switch doctors because my insurance says I have to. But there are also certain kinds of change I long for. These usually have to do with me. I want to be different because my life belongs to God. I want to look back and see that I've grown less selfish and more forgiving. I want to be noticeably more like Jesus than I was a year ago, or even more than I was this morning when I woke up. I long to be transformed.

As I mention in the introduction, the two main themes of *Namesake* are Transformation and Revelation. The first four days each week will deal with transformation, learning about the change God has brought about in others' stories and seeking change in our own lives. Revelation, the topic of the last day of each week, will uncover the unchanging identity and character of God, revealed to us in Scripture.

Transformation is a must for believers. Asking questions and learning about how we can change is helpful, but all of our acquired information and introspection would be incomplete if we didn't learn about the character and name of the One who is the reason and power behind our change. True change is found in discovering who God is, how God reveals Himself and His love to us, and how it makes a difference in our own lives. Only when we begin to see His unchanging

character do we find ourselves wanting to change to be more like Him. My desire to be transformed would be a confused circling of my own misguided ideas if I didn't have Jesus as a model of heart and actions. Changing ourselves means first learning about the God who provides both the model and the power to change.

From the very beginning of creation we see God revealing Himself to us, sharing aspects of His character and love, and inviting us to learn more in a relationship with him. God was never required to clue us in to any of this. He could have remained aloof, unknowable. Imagine what a frustrating and hopeless experiment this life would be if we had no knowledge of the God who created us and loves us intimately!

What do the following passages reveal about the nature and name of God?

Proverbs 18:10

Psalms 113:1-3

John 20:31



Despite God's efforts to know and be known by us, we humans quickly begin to see ourselves as the center of the universe instead of the God who belongs there. The first eleven chapters of the Bible are a depiction of how quickly the world goes downhill when we begin to worship our own misguided desires and put ourselves first.

The story starts off in such a beautiful setting, with perfect relationships, a perfect environment, and a God whose presence and love are palpable. Eden is a place of knowing and being known without any barriers. But all of that quickly changes as human choices invite disaster after disaster. The downward spiral culminates in chapter 11 of Genesis, aptly numbered since it is truly about the moral bankruptcy of the world. The collective people of the world gather in chapter 11 and work toward a common, selfish goal.

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves."

Genesis 11:4

Notice that their purpose in building the tower was to make a name for themselves.

Lifting up their own name implied that they were trusting in their own strength and striving for their own fame and success. They were physically reaching for god-like status. Anytime we put ourselves first, declaring that we can do life without God's help or guidance, we are putting ourselves in the place that belongs to God. And that always spells trouble.

We often refer to the resulting story as the Tower of Babel. The crashing down of the physical tower is mirrored in the chaos of human relationships and communication. The world as they knew it was in shambles. But the very next chapter provides a deep contrast. Abraham and Sarah are builders too, but while the people of Babel built a tower and lifted up their own name, Abraham and Sarah build an altar and call on the name of the Lord.

Their first encounter with God in Chapter 12 has Abraham and Sarah humbled and in awe of the greatest power in the universe. Their response to hearing the life-changing promises that are to come is to build an altar and call on the name of the Lord.

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Genesis 12:7-8

Building an altar implies both worship and sacrifice. Calling on the name of God means they are beginning to understand that the characteristics at the heart of God are central to the future they are now seeking.

Even more than with other names in Scripture, the use of name in reference to God is so much more than a proper noun that can be spelled on paper or spoken aloud. It is a representation of the One who bears that name: of His character, His promises, His strength. When Abram and Sarai call on the name of the Lord, it



is about so much more than getting God's attention. They are worshipping and praising God for who He is and also looking forward to His future help in their lives. At the beginning of Chapter 12, God approaches them. Now they are coming to God, throwing themselves on the mercy of His promises and His strength.

When we call on God's name, we aren't saying, "God, do things my way"; we're saying, "God, in agreement with who You are, with all Your power, Your love and mercy, I call on Your name—Your character—to act in this situation."

Prayer that calls on God's name is not about hoping that He will come around to see things the way we do, or that He will acquiesce to our will and do things our way. When we call on God's name, we are asking God to change our hearts, our character, to be more like His. Not the other way around.

Look up these other instances in Scripture of people calling on the name of the Lord. What do you learn from each passage?

Psalm 86:5

Romans 10:13

When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray in Matthew 6, how does He teach them to open each prayer? How are they to call on God's name? (v. 9)

Like Abraham and Sarah and the people of Babel, we're builders, too. We're constructing something with each action, decision, and interaction. We get to choose over and over whether to stay stuck in the bankruptcy of chapter 11 or to move with Abraham and Sarah into worshipping a God so great, so beyond our own fragile human existence that we instinctively know how much we need Him. Do we want to build a tower to ourselves or an altar to God? Whose name will we call on for strength and help?

Think of a time when you have called on God's name for a specific purpose or circumstance. What was the result or outcome?

How did you see God reveal Himself to you through that situation?



Proverbs 18:10 declares that “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” A life built for our own glory will only crumble into confusion. A life built for the glory of God’s name provides a strong tower, a safe place to reflect, to hope, to grow.

When we recognize just how badly we need to change, it’s important that we know the God who never changes. His strength provides an unshakable foundation, a place where we can trust our hearts to the work of a transforming God.

Pray About It

Begin a time of prayer by calling on the name of the Lord. While most of us pray silently, find a time and place you can pray out loud. Begin by speaking God’s name aloud several times. You might say Lord or Jesus or some other name you’ve heard used for God such as Shepherd, Warrior, Creator, or Comforter. In your prayer, ask God to teach you more about Himself and how He wants to be part of your life. Just as Abraham and Sarah did, let God know that you aren’t calling to ask Him to do things your way but, in agreement with who He is, you want to be part of His plan for the world and for your future.

Act on It

- Pick a “trigger” this week that will call you to a brief prayer. This can be when you’re stopped at a stop sign or a traffic light, when you start preparing or eating a meal, or when you climb stairs. Choose something that happens multiple times each day. When you encounter that trigger, call on God’s name, praising Him.
- What is one specific lesson you learned this week that you want to apply daily? Write a verse or word on a card and put it in an obvious place: your bathroom mirror, your car dashboard, etc. When you see it, ask God to help you make what you’re learning in this study a daily reality.

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1. Hubbard, Robert L., Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, pg. 91
 2. Richter, Sandra. *The Epic of Eden*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2008.



Week 1

VIDEO VIEWER GUIDE

If you ask someone “What is your name?” you’re really asking, “Tell me your _____.”

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of _____. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very _____. I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

Genesis 17:3-6

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the _____ of _____. Kings of peoples will come from her.”

Genesis 17:15-16

God sees impossibility as _____ for _____.

What God wants to say to us is this: I have a story to tell through _____, and my story is _____ than the story that you’ve been living.