



# **STRENGTH** *For the Journey*

TAKING YOUR NEXT STEPS WITH GOD

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## *Prayer*

Our Father, we offer you our praise and affirm that You are our “refuge and strength.”

We honor You as our Creator and the One whose presence we desire.

Help us to rely upon You more completely each day.

Teach us to delight in Your blessing upon our lives.

Forgive our sins and cause us to love You with all our hearts.

Fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we might love and care for others.

Share with us Your burden for the hurting and the lost.

Give us the grace to tell others about all that Jesus is and means to us.

Let others see Him by our personal authentic witness.

Like Abraham, may we be known as “a friend of God.”

Let us, like him, accept Your promises and live by them.

Let us grow in the faith that gives You pleasure.

We pray that our church will be a powerful witness in Chicago.

May many come to learn of Your Grace offered to all who wish to receive it.

In the name of Jesus our Savior and Lord,  
Amen

THE  
MOODY  
CHURCH

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## Introduction

“Abraham was a friend of God”

Perhaps you, like me, have often pondered what would make a fitting epitaph on our tombstone. Surely, there could be none greater than the words recorded in Scripture, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness—and *he was called a friend of God*” (James 2:23, italics mine). When you have such an honor, it dwarfs all other relationships. At the end of the day nothing else matters as much as whether we can be classified as God’s friend.

These messages focus on the life of Abraham, but of course we will interact with other people whose lives intersect with his: his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, etc. In the process we will have a better grasp of our own spiritual journey, but also understand the present conflict in the land of Israel.

Abraham was given some very specific promises about the territory that he and his descendants would occupy; he was also promised that through his seed, redemption and hope would come to all nations. As a result, we can say that through faith, Abraham is the father of us all.

We must be reminded that just as Abraham was tested, so we will be. And yet, we have the confidence that God is with us, growing us, challenging us, and stretching us through the experiences He brings into our lives. Studying the life of this remarkable man will give us the strength we need to carry on in the walk of life.

The purpose of these studies is simple: it is to become God’s friend in a more intimate and personal way. As His friend, we should welcome Him with joy and confidence into our lives, changing whatever we must to make the Almighty at home in our midst.

Thanks in advance for joining me in this refreshing journey.

If every member and attender of The Moody Church were to become a better friend of God, we might discover that:

The Moody Church is a trusted place where anyone can connect with God and others.

The Moody Church is a place where all who attend experience the presence of God.

The Moody Church is a place where anyone who is lonely, discouraged, hurting, and confused can find love, acceptance, hope, forgiveness, and encouragement.

The Moody Church is a place that affirms the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation and the only One who can connect us with God.

The Moody Church is a place of “irresistible influence,” a church that changes our neighborhood, our city and our country.

The Moody Church is an equipping church that sends missionaries and workers around the world for permanent and short-term mission assignments.

The Moody Church gives sacrificially to meet all of our ministry needs.

The Moody Church seeks God, inviting Him to lead us in the days ahead as we anticipate an expanding ministry in our community.

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## Fall Series 2005

Every fall we as a church want to be unified in our exploration of Scripture. The sermons that I preach on Sunday morning form the basis of our Sunday School, and in most cases, even our ABF's Bible study. This year, we have chosen the life of Abraham to encourage us on our journey to the finish line. Abraham looked for a city which has foundations, "whose builder and maker is God." And, by faith, we follow in his footsteps.

I'm sure you know that Abraham's original name was Abram, but God changed his name to Abraham when he was 99 years old. The name Abram meant "high father," but now he is called Abraham, "father of a multitude." The name is prophetic of the hosts of the nations who would become Abraham's spiritual posterity.

Abraham's wife also had a name change from Sarai to Sarah, which means "princess." Thus, she is designated as one who will be in the royal messianic line. And, it is interesting to know that the name "Isaac" means "he laughs" to memorialize the humor of the situation (see Genesis 17 for the details). Clearly, names meant a great deal to the ancients, often conveying significant meanings.

For our purposes, we will always refer to this couple as Abraham and Sarah, the names by which they are best known. Thus, even when I am teaching the early chapters of their lives, I shall not recognize the name change; this is done for the sake of uniformity and simplicity—after all, they are Abraham and Sarah!

These studies, with an appropriate memory verse and questions, have been prepared for your benefit. We encourage you to use them *in preparation* for hearing the messages. In other words, work one week ahead and you will have much greater profit from the sermons. Imagine coming to church, knowing the passage that will be presented and some of the background and details.

Thanks for joining me in these studies as we derive *Strength for the Journey!*

# A STEP OF FAITH

## *A Step of Faith*

*September 4, 2005*

### GENESIS 12:1-9

The call of Abraham is one of the most important events in the Bible. Although he was a pagan, God came to him and told him to go into a land he had never visited. There he would be blessed and there further revelation would be given to him.

### MEMORY VERSE

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. -Genesis 12:3

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- How was Abraham's obedience a step of faith? What are all the factors he had to consider in this move?
- In the Bible, the first 2000 years of human history are covered in eleven chapters. Yet the rest of the book of Genesis is devoted to Abraham and his descendants. Give several reasons why you think Abraham is so important to the history of redemption and to us today.
- With the help of a Bible map, find out how far Abraham and his entire entourage traveled in obedience to God.
- What is the significance of the altar that Abraham built?

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Help your children understand that the land Abraham was given is the present day Israel, etc. Find present day Jerusalem, Bethlehem, etc.
- Share experiences about those times when God called you to go somewhere or do something that was new and unexpected. How did God show His faithfulness?



# A WAVERING FAITH

## *Wavering Faith*

September 11, 2005

### GENESIS 12:10-20

Abraham, newly called by God, goes into Egypt instead of depending on God when the famine comes. There he does not build an altar, but actually ends up lying rather than trusting God. We must keep in mind that we can believe God one day and end up distrusting Him the next.

### MEMORY VERSE

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

-Genesis 12:7

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- What does this teach us about trust in God? What sin did Abraham commit once he took matters into his own hands?
- How did God show His grace to Abraham even when he was in a state of disobedience? Do you have a similar story to tell?
- With the help of a map, trace the route Abraham probably took when he left the land and went into Egypt.
- When Abraham returns to the land that God promised him, what does he do? (See 13:1-3).

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Tell the story of Abraham's journey to Egypt, and use it as a springboard for a discussion about lying. Was it right for Abraham to lie? Is it ever right to lie?
- Give personal examples of situations in which lying appeared to be convenient.
- How does a lie show distrust in God?



# A COSTLY FAITH

## *A Costly Faith*

September 18, 2005

### GENESIS 13

In this account, Abraham and Lot separate; Abraham shows faith by letting Lot choose whatever land he wanted; Lot shows his worldliness by choosing what seems best and most prosperous for him. Their different values cause them to make different decisions, with of course, different consequences.

### MEMORY VERSE

So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

-Genesis 13:18

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- How does Abraham show his greatness in this situation?
- What does this story tell us about Lot?
- Discuss similar situations in which you have had to choose between possessions and character.
- Again, trace this story on a map, showing the Jordan River and the relative places where each man and his family lived.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Have children role play the story: let one be Abraham, and another be Lot. Let the children imagine what each was thinking after the decision was made.
- What great lessons can we learn from this story?



# A GENEROUS FAITH

## *A Generous Faith*

September 25, 2005

### GENESIS 14

Abraham puts his own life on the line to rescue Lot, and after a successful rout of the enemies, he refused to profit from it. He paid tithes to Melchizedek, and even more surprising, he refuses to take any of the wealth the king of Sodom offered him for help in fighting the insurgents. He raised his hands to the Most High and made an oath that he would receive nothing from the king, "so that you will never be able to say you made Abraham rich."

### MEMORY VERSE

And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

-Genesis 14:19-20

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Think of reasons why Abraham might have decided not to rescue his nephew. What does his decision teach us about loyalty and commitment?
- How does Abraham show that he is a witness to the God who has called him?
- Read Genesis 14:13-24. Look up the name Melchizedek in a Bible dictionary to find out what is known about him.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Share stories of when you were loyal to someone even if they did not show loyalty to you.
- Do you have examples of when you had the opportunity to receive money but refused because you wanted to do what was right?



# A LASTING FAITH

## *A Lasting Faith*

*October 2, 2005*

### GENESIS 15

God makes an everlasting covenant (or promise) with Abraham. We also benefit from this covenant through the New Covenant which is ours in Jesus Christ. Please notice that Abraham was asleep when the covenant was made, signifying that it was unconditional, that is, that God would fulfill it whether Abraham and his descendants were faithful or not.

### MEMORY VERSE

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." -Genesis 15:1

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- What was Abraham's dilemma when the chapter opens?
- What does 15:6 tell us about salvation in the Old Testament era?
- What is the long term significance of this covenant?
- With the help of a Bible dictionary, check out the boundaries of the land God gave to Abraham in 15:18-21.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Creatively show the children how they can act out this story: with one child playing the role of Abraham who was asleep, and another child reading the words of the Lord in v. 13-16 (books or stuffed animals can be used to represent the dead animals).
- The bottom line: God's promises are dependable; what He says, He will do.



# A MISDIRECTED FAITH

## *A Misdirected Faith*

October 9, 2005

### GENESIS 16; also 21:1-20

Here we see Abraham in wavering disobedience; as a consequence Ishmael is born. But the story will also be connected to Genesis 21, and we will see God's faithfulness even in the life and descendants of Ishmael. This shows how God works in spite of human frailty and failure.

### MEMORY VERSE

So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."

-Genesis 16:13

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Keep in mind that in this account, Abraham acted in keeping with the customs of the day, but clearly, this was neither God's best nor God's most perfect will. Yet, think of the ways in which God showed mercy to the mother and her son.
- Read chapter 21 where there is a similar story, but the event occurred when Ishmael was much older. What does this account teach us about the present conflict between the Jews and Arabs?
- Discuss the conflict that erupted in this "blended family" where two children were in the same home with different mothers. Can you give some contemporary examples?

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Tell the story emphasizing God's care for Hagar and Ishmael even though they were not the "favored ones."
- The children can easily act out the story, but be sure that they end by understanding the faithfulness of God to both families.



# A GROWING FAITH

## *A Growing Faith*

October 16, 2005

### GENESIS 17, 18

Here Abraham is told that the child of promise would yet be born through his wife Sarai, who would be renamed Sarah. So, despite the age of the two of them, God would give them a son. God will bless Ishmael, but the covenant would be established with Isaac. Here we see both the sovereign choice and faithfulness of God.

### MEMORY VERSE

"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."

-Genesis 17:1b-2

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Both Abram and Sarai have their names changed in this chapter. With the help of a Bible dictionary or commentary, find out all you can about what this meant.
- Why is the covenant to which God so often refers, so important? Were all who were circumcised considered part of the Old Testament family of God?
- How is the humanness of Abraham and Sarah displayed in these chapters?

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Have a child play the role of Abraham when God told him he would have a son (v. 17-18).
- Discuss the faithfulness of God in giving Abraham a son just as promised. Why can God make promises that seem to us to be impossible for Him to keep?



# A PRAYING FAITH

## *A Praying Faith*

October 23, 2005

### GENESIS 18:22-33

In this account, Abraham is met by visitors who eat with the family, who confirm that Sarah will bear a child. These men also confide to Abraham that Sodom is to be destroyed. Abraham pleads for the city, wanting Lot to be spared. God surprises Abraham by destroying Sodom, but nevertheless answers Abraham's prayer in an unexpected way.

### MEMORY VERSE

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. -Hebrews 4:16

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Ponder Abraham's experience with the visitors and what they told him. Describe Abraham's prayer of intercession. Was this bargaining with God? Why not?
- Why do we have reason to believe that Abraham thought that Sodom would not be destroyed? How did God "remember Abraham"? (19:29).
- Read this account to understand why God destroyed Sodom, but keep in mind Ezekiel 16:48-49.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Find ancient Sodom on a map (the southern tip of the Dead Sea).
- Read the story of Abraham's prayer to the children, and then spend time praying for a few of the cities they know about. Especially emphasize that we can come into God's presence and that He is listening.



# A WORLDLY FAITH

## *A Worldly Faith*

November 6, 2005

### GENESIS 19

Here you have the tragic story of Lot and how riches and possessions affected him and his family. The famous terse statement, “Remember Lot’s wife” captures the lifestyle of someone who could not leave the world behind. Lot himself ends tragically, committing incest with his daughters.

### MEMORY VERSE

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

-I Corinthians 10:13

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Try to trace the series of decisions that Lot made that led to his personal moral and spiritual disaster.
- What light does the New Testament shed on this story?  
(See II Peter 2:4-10).
- We have here the origin of the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 19:30-38). With the help of a Bible dictionary find out all you can about these tribes.
- Read Luke 17:32-33 to find out how Jesus used this story.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- Describe what happened to Lot’s wife after the family left Sodom (19:26). The reason for her tragedy is that she disobeyed specific instruction by the angel (v. 17).
- Discuss the lessons to be learned from this account.



# A TESTED FAITH

## *A Tested Faith*

*November 13, 2005*

### GENESIS 22

Here we have the supreme test as to whether Abraham was willing to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. He passed the test by proving that God was first in his life, and that obedience and worship always are linked.

### MEMORY VERSE

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." -Genesis 22:12

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Why has this passage been a stumbling block to so many people? How do you think you would have reacted if God had demanded this from you? (See Hebrews 11:17-19).
- Look up Mount Moriah in a Bible dictionary. You might be surprised to find where this hill top was, and where it supposedly continues to exist today.

### FOR THE CHILDREN

- This is an easy story to role play, with one child playing the part of Isaac and the other the part of Abraham. Stress that it never was God's intention that Abraham kill his son!
- Discuss the significance of the ram caught in the bushes. What does this teach us about God and His ways?
- Discuss the kinds of trials God brings into our lives to test us to know whether we love Him supremely? Do you have personal examples?



# YOUR STEP OF FAITH

*Your Step of Faith*

*November 20, 2005*

## COMMITMENT SUNDAY

This is commitment Sunday when we take all of the lessons we have learned and apply them to our values, our lifestyles, and our giving. This service takes us another step toward the completion of the Christian Life Center, and the vision God has given to us. We have studied the life of Abraham who acknowledged that God was the source of all that he had; he knew Whom he served.

We hope that you have been praying about this important day and all that it means for the growth of The Moody Church and the Gospel in Chicago.

## SCRIPTURE TO PONDER

Paul wrote, “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” (II Corinthians 8:1-3).

Wow!

Imagine a poor congregation that was so anxious to give that they begged for the opportunity to give! That, of course, is the spirit of generosity that must be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. What a proof that God is alive!



# My Commitment to Taking My Next Steps with God During the Next Twelve Months.

I have earnestly prayed and thoughtfully considered what things God wants me to do in my next steps with Him, and I am this day making my commitment to:

Share my faith with others by my life and my words \_\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

Read and study my Bible each week for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

Devote time in thoughtful prayer each week for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

Dedicate my spiritual gifts in service to the \_\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in which ministries you plan to serve)  
ministries as the Lord leads me.

Give \$ \_\_\_\_\_ weekly/monthly to meet the day-to-day operational needs of the ministries of The Moody Church.

Give sacrificially \$ \_\_\_\_\_ weekly/monthly/annually, over the coming year, to meet the Reaching Toward Tomorrow capital needs of The Moody Church.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Keep this copy as a personal reminder of your commitment to take your next steps with God.

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