

Session 4: Grace to Grieve

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

Even through painful times of loss, God’s grace shines through our grief so that we can find hope and joy.

Head Change

To know that God sends comfort to those who grieve.

Heart Change

To feel gratitude for the grace God gives when we are hurting.

Life Change

To trust that God will comfort the grieving and to look forward in faith to future joy despite current hard times.

OPEN

When you are sad, do you like to be left alone or would you rather be with people? When has someone done a great job comforting you during a difficult time?

We will all face grief at some point in our lives. We even see characters in the Bible who faced deep loss. Isaac is a great example of someone who experienced both loss and God’s gracious provision.

Of Israel’s three patriarchs, Isaac is the least known. We just don’t have much information about him beyond his near-sacrifice as a child, his marriage to Rebekah, and his sons’ dispute over his blessing. These vignettes show us glimpses of him as a child, young adult, and elderly man. But just because the Bible is somewhat quiet about a person doesn’t mean his life doesn’t speak to us.

Lined writing area for notes and reflections.

DISCUSS

Charlie opened his teaching by focusing on Isaac's loss of his mother, Sarah. Read Genesis 23:1–4, 17–20; 24:67.

Isaac was a grown man when his mother died and her death appeared to hit him hard. At the end of Genesis 24, the author says, “. . . and he [Isaac] was comforted after his mother's death.” To be comforted implies grief. **Have you experienced, or been close to someone who has gone through an extended period of grief or depression? What sorts of things comforted or brightened your outlook during that season?**

Read Genesis 24:1–9. Three years went by, and Isaac's father decided it was time to find Isaac a wife. Abraham was concerned with finding him a woman of character, who feared the Lord, “not from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live.” He felt an extended family member, among his cousins in Haran, would be the safest option. **How does Abraham's desire for Isaac to be married to a godly woman show his care for his son?**

Abraham had also urged his servant not to take Isaac with him. He wanted to ensure that Isaac remained in the land God had promised to Abram when God called him out of Haran into Canaan. **How does Abraham's commitment to God's covenant also benefit Isaac? In what ways have you seen someone's faithfulness to God help another person in a time of need?**

Read Genesis 24:10–32, 57–67.

Abraham's plan worked. Rebekah showed her good character through hospitality and gracious service to the weary servant. Her family demonstrated how they valued her by asking her what she wanted to do. She agreed to the marriage and was sent off with her family's blessing. **In what ways does the story of finding Rebekah show God's providence in Isaac's life?**

In what ways have you experienced proof of God's caring love for you?

Even during times of provision, we can trust God and his plan. Rebekah trusted God enough to leave her family and move to a place she had never seen for a husband

she had never met. **In what ways is God asking you to trust his plan today?**

Isaac loved Rebekah almost as soon as he saw her. The word for “loved” in verse 67, used to describe Isaac’s response to taking Rebekah as his wife, denotes affection, desire, devotion, and connection. Charlie noted that the Bible does not often directly connect marriage to love—Isaac and Rebekah’s relationship is conspicuously the first relationship described in this way. **What does the love match between Isaac and Rebekah reveal about God’s grace?**

In what ways have you experienced God’s grace through the people he’s placed in your life?

Note: To explore how God showed faithfulness to Isaac in Genesis 26, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** below.

Rebekah’s coming also provided comfort for Isaac in his lingering grief. As Charlie said, “God will give you new relationships that do not replace the old ones but help you to hurdle the waves of grief.” Whether you’ve lost a valued relationship or not, the thought of a new relationship can feel overwhelming or unwanted. **What feelings come to you when you think about forming new relationships after losing someone close to you? What can the story of Isaac and Rebekah teach you about God’s provision through relationships?**

Note: To examine how Isaac’s life exemplifies rest and surrender in Genesis 24–26, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** below.

Grief can seem all-consuming when we are in the middle of it. **How does the story of Isaac show you the possibility of finding joy after, or even in the middle of, grief?**

Charlie emphasized the gift that our emotions are to us, even the heavy feelings we often try to avoid. It’s a gift to feel affection, love, joy. It’s also a gift to feel grief. God sends grace to those who grieve. **How has he shown grace to you in your sadness? What could it look like to trust him with your grief?**

You might not be in the middle of grief, but you can be a comfort to those who are in pain. **How can you comfort others in their grief? What actions would be helpful?**

What kinds of “aid” are not helpful when a person is grieving?

LAST WORD

Rebekah was a God-orchestrated gift to Isaac, both a needed companion and wife. But their relationship was much more than God helping Isaac through his grief. Isaac and Rebekah are the first couple in the Bible described as “in love,” a sweet foundation that would unify them in the years to come.

In our grief, confusion, or times of need, God will also be abundantly gracious to us. He knows our hurts and suffering, and he is ready to show us grace and mercy.

We can take heart when we grieve—God is with us. He provides joy when it feels impossible and people to both support and grieve alongside us. And when we are not grieving, we can know he works through us to comfort others with his love.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide for the book of Genesis so that you can read these chapters and understand their context. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.

Horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 lines.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Genesis.

1. God's Faithfulness to Isaac

God's covenant with Abraham was a promise to bless him and his "seed"—children and descendants—to make their name great and give them the land of Canaan as an eternal inheritance. The Abrahamic covenant was part of God's redemptive plan for all of humanity. God was narrowing his focus from all of Noah's descendants to just one family, through which he would provide a redeemer who would fulfill the promise to bless the whole world.

In Genesis 17:19–21, God informed Abraham that he would have a son who would continue the family line of God's people. Abraham's covenant would become Isaac's as well. But it wasn't enough to let Isaac tag along on his father's promise. Years later, God spoke directly to Isaac and renewed the covenant with him.

Read Genesis 26:1–6. After Abraham's death, Isaac became the leader of his family. But it was not an easy time to start in a position of leadership: Isaac had had two restless adult sons and he was trying to provide for his family during a famine. But God provided for Isaac. Compare God's promise to Isaac with his covenant to Abraham in Genesis 17:5–8. **What are the common elements of God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 17 and Isaac in Genesis 26? What does the consistency of God's promise show us about his faithfulness to Abraham and Isaac?**

Read 26:12–22. Even in a foreign land during a famine and water shortage, God blessed Isaac. He became wealthy despite run-ins with powerful kings and jealous

neighbors and always credited God with his success.

When life is difficult and people stand against you, does it become difficult to see God's provision in your life?

What helps you trust God during challenging situations?

Read 26:23–25. Isaac moved his family back home, built an altar, and “called on the name of the Lord.” The Lord appeared to him again and renewed his covenant. Then Isaac’s servants dug another well—a visible sign of Isaac’s faith—which filled with water, a visible sign of God’s blessing. **Which parts of the covenant did God fulfill in Isaac’s lifetime? How does the story of God’s faithfulness to Isaac encourage your faith?**

2. Isaac is an example of a surrendered life.

Considering how seldom we see Isaac in the pages of Genesis, his life offers us a surprising model of contentment, rest, and a heart surrendered to God’s will.

A. He honored his father and mother.

- Isaac was an obedient and trusting son to Abraham, continuing with him up Mount Moriah despite worrisome hints about what might happen (Genesis 22).
- He honored his mother with deep mourning upon her death, which hints at a close relationship with her (Genesis 24:67).
- He trusted his father’s decision to find him a suitable wife (Genesis 24).
- He cooperated with his estranged brother Ishmael to bury their father (Genesis 25:8–10).

B. He followed the Lord whole-heartedly.

- He turned to God in prayer for Rebekah while she was barren and God answered with twin boys (Genesis 25:21).
- He obeyed when God told him not to travel to Egypt despite the famine and the attacks of his enemies (Genesis 26:1–6).
- He credited God with his prosperity and provision of water for his flocks. Even in conflict with neighbors, he was a man of peace (Genesis 26:22).
- He took on the covenant of his father, Abraham (Genesis 26:24).
- He worshipped God and promised fidelity (Genesis 26:25).

C. He trusted God’s plan over cultural norms.

In patrilineal societies, where families are defined by the father’s ancestral line, the oldest son inherits the majority of his father’s goods and social status when he becomes head of the clan or family. Isaac’s twin sons turned that tradition upside down, an event foreshadowed at their birth (see Genesis 25:23–26).

The twins clashed over their birthrights and blessing (a declaration that God had chosen the recipient to carry on the covenant made with their father). Later in Isaac’s life, Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing Esau expected to receive as the eldest son (see Genesis 27). Though Jacob (and his mother!) wanted to steal the blessing through deception, Isaac knew God had foretold Jacob would rule over his older brother (see Genesis 25:23). By letting Jacob keep the blessing, Isaac accepted and submitted to God’s will, despite the cultural tradition at the time.

As you think about Isaac’s demeanor and life choices, consider your relationship with your parents and/or parental figures. **If you are under their authority, do you seek their counsel and wisdom? In what ways do you live in peace with your family?**

Think of your professional life. **To what degree do you credit the Lord with your success? What could it look like to honor him in your work?**

Sometimes life gets turned upside down, and our “normal” patterns are tossed out for unexpected or unwanted solutions. Our children choose careers or spouses we’d never have chosen for them. We put off switching jobs because it seems counter to the norm. We suffer chronic illness. Whatever the situation, we can learn from Isaac’s example, trusting God’s Word over cultural or personal expectations.

Take some time to think through your circumstances, then to pray for wisdom, faith, and courage to obey the Lord’s leading.

3. Weekly Reading Plan

Genesis is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into

God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Session Four focused on God's grace to Isaac while he grieved the loss of his mother. Rebekah was God's gift to him. The Isaac's later life shows us family man content in his home, yet one whose weaknesses allowed family dysfunction to fester.

Day 1: Searching for a Wife (Genesis 24:1–32)

Day 2: Rebekah Agrees to Marry Isaac (Genesis 24:33–61)

Day 3: Abraham Dies (Genesis 24:62–25:18)

Day 4: Jacob and Esau's Rivalry (Genesis 25:19–26:35)

Day 5: Isaac Is Deceived by Jacob (Genesis 27:1–28:9; 35:27–29)