

# Loving Strangers

## Genesis 18

From the very beginning God created a world where food and friendship go together (Gen. 1:29-30; 2:15-17). Adam and Eve betrayed God by eating (Gen. 3:6), and Jesus offered Himself on the cross so we could come back into fellowship and communion with Him (1 Cor. 11:24-25). God invites people to eat with Him, and teaches His us to imitate His hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9). Abraham is waiting for the Lord to fulfill the promise to give him a son, and he welcomes strangers into his home (Heb. 13:2). Abraham is not just doing a nice thing, but becomes a friend of God, an enormous privilege and responsibility.

### ***Loving Strangers isn't Easy***

Abraham is resting in his tent in the heat of the day when he sees three men (v1). It's siesta time, but he hops up, runs to meet them, and asks them to come, rest, drink and eat (vv2-5). Then he asks his wife (v6). He treats them with great dignity, addressing them as "my lord", but they are unknown to him (Heb. 13:2). These are not his friends yet. The word *hospitality* in Greek literally means "love of strangers", a sacrificial welcoming to those unknown. If Abraham wasn't eager to do this, it never would have happened. But his disposition to bless others causes him to see this opportunity as the reason why they came by in the first place (v5). God has called Abraham out of Ur and provided for him constantly; now Abraham is imitating Yahweh's hospitality. He under-promises and over-delivers on the food: fresh bread, tender meat, butter and milk (vv6-8, cf. v5). Hospitality doesn't need to be fancy, but we are encouraged to be generous. The most important thing we give is ourselves, full of the peace and joy of God's grace (Prov. 15:17). Abraham doesn't eat, but waits on them (v8). This is what we should think of as a patriarch. Nothing here is cheap, easy or convenient, but Abraham and Sarah give gladly.

### ***Loving Strangers is Sanctifying***

The visitor, who we find out is the Lord (v13), asks where Sarah is and says He is to going to come back when she will have a son (vv9-10). She is spying behind the tent and hears God's emphatic statement—"behold" (v10)—but she laughs within herself saying how ridiculous it is to think she'll conceive with Abraham in her old age (vv11-12). It is apparent now that these are not ordinary visitors. Yahweh knows her thoughts and asks why she laughed, stating wonderfully, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Sarah denies laughing, but God contradicts her: "No, but you did laugh!" (v15). Sarah's laughter is not like Abraham's chapter 17. She doubts God's power and the integrity of His promise. It's clear that God was not just there to partake of good food and sweet company, but wanted them to know they would be blessed. It worked because Hebrews 11:11 says, "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." God uses our hospitality to sanctify us. We serve, but really we are served. We don't have people into our homes because anything in there is perfect. We welcome people in order to serve and grow more like Jesus. This is why it's more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

### ***Loving Strangers is Serving & Befriending Jesus***

This is only time in the Old Testament God appears to eat with anyone, but Jesus told us how to show him hospitality: "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me . . . Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:34-36, 40). Abraham is God's friend (Is. 41:8; Jms. 2:23), and it's easy for us to see God condescending, coming down to his level. What's harder is to see God raising him up to be His true friend. God reasons that He shouldn't hide His plans from the man who will be a great and mighty nation, a blessing to all nations (vv17-18). Abraham will be faithful, so God shares His plans, and Abraham responds by standing before Him and reverently asking lots of questions. Friends share intimate knowledge and plans, seeking one another's counsel. Abraham gets to do this with God Almighty. Because Jesus eats with and leads us to serve Him as we love strangers, so do we. He hears our prayers and sets a table for us wherever we are.

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

### Today's Passage: Genesis 18:2-5, 12-14

*2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4 Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."*

1. When Abraham saw the three men whom he had never met before, what did he do (verses 2-4)?
2. Sarah is far too old to have a child without God's miraculous help, and she doubts God will fulfill His word. What does God say in response (verse 14)?
3. God has been showing Abraham hospitality as He has protected him in Canaan and Egypt, continually providing for and protecting him. When will God show us hospitality today, in this worship service? How can you show hospitality to people in your life, both family and people you meet?
4. Draw a picture of the three travelers sitting down to a huge feast prepared by Abraham and Sarah. Draw Sarah standing in the room next door, listening to the conversation.

### Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. —Genesis 18:14*