

leading the Bible study. He prays and asks God to open up opportunities for him to serve. What should Jim do in the meantime?

Discuss with students:

In Matthew 25:1-13, the Lord Jesus speaks of the parable of the ten virgins. As the ten virgins were waiting for the Bridegroom to come, the five wise virgins prepared enough oil for themselves. They did not sit around doing nothing. They utilized their time wisely to make preparations. While Jim is waiting, he needs to equip himself. When David was called to play the harp for King Saul in his palace, Saul obviously did not know that David had been secretly anointed. But David used the opportunity to serve in the palace to gain firsthand information about running a nation. Sometimes our plans have been put on hold indefinitely. Like David, we can use this waiting time profitably. We need to absorb all kinds of spiritual knowledge, be filled with the Holy Spirit and gain experience in doing holy work.

Scenario 4

Richard earnestly desires to receive the Holy Spirit. He has been praying for almost 20 years. Everyone he knows has already received the Holy Spirit, even children younger than himself. This makes him a little embarrassed. During prayer sessions before services, he mentions it to God each time he prays, but he only prays for a short while before getting up to do something else. He feels God already knows what he wants so he doesn't need to repeat himself too much. As Richard waits for the promised Holy Spirit, what things should he take note of?

Discuss with students:

Read Galatians 5:5. As we are waiting for God, it is important to pray. If we wait without praying, we will grow weak in faith and lose our sense of direction. When a farmer waits for the seeds to grow, he needs to water them daily. Prayers are likened to water that fortifies our faith and hope so that we can endure till that time.

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



Anna and Simeon both led quiet and peaceable lives, godly and respectable in every way (1 Tim 2:2). To men, their uneventful lives were nothing noteworthy. But in the eyes of God, their extraordinary faiths were to be remembered till eternity.

Lesson 7

Isaac

Listed Scriptures

Gen 24; 25:19-26; 26-27; 35:27-29; Heb 5; Phil 2:1-18

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn from Isaac's faith, meekness and obedience
- 2) To learn about conflict management
- 3) To learn to live in peace and harmony with others

Memory Verse

"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." (Phil 4:5)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 31-35

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The Well

The well was the people's chief source of water and was usually found outside town along the main road. Many people had to walk a mile or more for their water. The wells were generally dug and protected by villages. Some wells were probably more than 200 feet deep. There was a lot of labor involved in digging a well so disputes often arose between villages and/or herdsmen who also wished to claim and use the wells. If someone dug a well, he was staking a claim to the land. Some wells had locks to keep thieves from stealing the water. To plug up someone's well was seen as an act of war and was one of the most serious crimes in the land. When the Philistines ruined and took over Isaac's wells, he had every right to fight back, but he chose not to.

Gerar

Gerar was a Philistine city in the Negev. The area of Gerar was a desolate place on the edge of the wilderness which made water as precious as gold. Both Abraham and Isaac lived here and faced similar experiences with their wives and Abimelech of Gerar (Gen 20:1,2; 26:1-33).

W A R M U P



Let Go

One day, a little child playing with a valuable vase put his hand into it and found it stuck inside. His father too, tried his best, but all in vain. They were thinking of breaking the vase when the father said, "Now my son, make one more try. Open your hand and hold your fingers straight as you see me doing, and then pull." To his astonishment, the little fellow said, "Oh no, father. I couldn't put my fingers out like that, because if I did I would drop my penny."

This may seem like a charming story, but many of us are like this little boy who holds onto his penny no matter what. As believers however, God wants us to surrender and let go, so that we can experience liberation. Today, we will look at a man who did just that.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Isaac

The name Isaac derives from the verb *shq* "laughs" or "will laugh". Isaac's name, "laughs" commemorates the two laughing incidents that occurred. In Genesis 17:17 when God told Abraham how Sarah was to give birth to a son, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed at the absurdity of having a child at such an old age. Then, in Genesis 18:12-15 Sarah laughs when she hears God promise them a son. But God is a faithful God. Isaac became the miracle child born to Sarah at 90 years of age and to Abraham at 100. Isaac is truly a child of the covenant. Isaac's life serves as a role model for believers on how to lead a quiet life based on God's will.



In Genesis 22, it records the incident where God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a burnt offering. From the events that transpired we see that Isaac had inherited his father's strong faith. Having grown up watching his father offer sacrifices, Isaac knew what materials were required and how things were done. Yet, when Abraham began to bind Isaac up and lay him on the altar upon the wood, Isaac neither struggled nor fled. He did not question his father's sanity or utter a single word. Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, Isaac silently obeyed his father.

We do not like uncertainties. We like to feel in control. Faith, however, is in direct contrast. It means giving up the reins to God, and relying on Him. It means trusting and obeying God even if the purpose cannot be seen. At the time, Abraham could not imagine why God asked him to do such a difficult thing. Similarly, Isaac did not understand why his father was binding him up and offering him as a sacrifice. But they both had the faith that God will provide (Gen 22:14). There are many examples where man needs to simply obey. Hosea the prophet was asked to take a woman of harlotry as his wife. Namaan was asked to bathe in the river Jordan seven times to be cured of his leprosy. Elijah was asked to go to a poor widow's house rather than to someone of better means. Although these people did not fully comprehend God's purpose, they obeyed. Let us learn from the faith of Isaac who quietly obeyed even though he did not understand. In time, God's will and plan will be revealed to us.

Reflection:

1. From this incident, how is Isaac's faith manifested?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your faith?
3. How would you react when asked to do something illogical or incomprehensible? Why?



a. Obedient to his father

Read Genesis Chapter 24. As Isaac grew older Abraham became concerned for his son's marriage. He instructed his servant to go back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. God paved the way for Abraham's servant so that he was able to find a good match. Isaac thus took Rebekah as his wife and loved her.

All this sounds like a fantasy, far-removed from the way society works today. Our first thoughts might be, "Why was Isaac able to marry Rebekah, a woman he does not know at all? How could he entrust such an important matter into the hands of his father and worse still, to the judgments of an old servant? Matchmaking is just too outdated." Nowadays the norm is to date so that both parties can see whether they are compatible. If we examine the attitudes of the people of the world with that of Isaac's we will notice one essential difference: obedience to God. People of this world choose a partner based on their own criteria and preferences. S/he has to be good looking, educated, financially stable, have the same interests, compatible personalities and the list goes on. In contrast, Isaac's decision was not based on what he liked or disliked, but whether it was God's will. Throughout this entire incident Isaac was not informed of the discussion between Abraham and the old servant. He was not called in for his opinion. But what enabled Isaac to submit was in knowing that all this came about with God's guidance. In Genesis 24:7, Abraham knew that "God will send his angel before you (servant)." Abraham did not entrust the matter into his servant's hand but into the Lord's. So when the servant told Isaac all the things that had transpired, Isaac completely submitted. In marriage as in many aspects of his life, Isaac did not seek his own way but fully obeyed God. As a result a beautiful, hard-working and loving woman was given to Isaac in marriage and he was comforted after his mother's death (24:67).

b. Obedient to God

Genesis 26:1-13 records how a great famine came upon the land of Israel. In an effort to escape the famine, Isaac first went to Gerar. Later, God appeared to him and told him not to go down to Egypt. God wanted to see what Isaac's choice was; to obey God and stay in a famine torn Promised Land, or disobey God and travel to Egypt, a gentile land of plenty. It would have been understandable for Isaac to move down to Egypt. There was no food in the land and he had to feed his family. To stay in Israel was an illogical and unreasonable demand from God. But Isaac had faith in God's words. He knew that if he remained in Israel God would take care of his needs.

God tests us too to see how far we will go for Him. We should obey God not only in times when everything is going well but also in times of trials and difficulties. Although there may be famine in the Promised Land, we need to follow God even if it means we have to suffer. If we leave the land of Israel, i.e. the church, we will be spiritually endangered even though we may have material gain. As a result of Isaac's obedience, God performed a miracle—while

the people around him suffered from the famine, Isaac prospered and reaped a hundred fold.

Reflection:

1. Does obedience come easily for you? Why or why not?
2. What can we do to be more obedient?
3. When reflecting upon our own faith, are we fair-weathered Christians, or do we follow God come rain or shine?



a. Isaac was a peacemaker

Read Genesis 26:17-22. When the people of the land saw Isaac's prosperity, they became jealous of him and wanted to drive him away. Time and time again they came to take over the wells that Isaac had just dug. To a herdsman a well was a vital necessity for the survival of his family members, crops and animals. If someone dug a well, he was staking a claim to the land so to take over someone's well was a serious violation and signaled an act of war. Although Isaac had the means to fight with them, he refused. In Genesis 14:1-16, it records how Abraham his father took his 318 trained men to rescue Lot and his family from the hands of the four kings (Gen 14:1-16). These men would have been part of the inheritance that Isaac received from his father. How easy it would have been for Isaac to give his men the command. But Isaac did not resort to aggression or violence. He took the harder route by using kindness and gentleness to win them over (Rom 12:19-21).

b. Isaac understood that God will avenge

Isaac refused to fight his enemies because he understood that God will take revenge for him (Rom 12:19). Although by being meek and mild he lost his wells, Isaac knew that God was in control and that "the Lord searches the mind and tries the heart and gives to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer 17:10). During the conflict, God did not appear to Isaac to comfort him. Nor did God warn his enemies in a dream. It is only in Genesis 26:24 that God appeared to Isaac by night to comfort and bless him. Similarly, God may allow us to face injustice to see how much we entrust to the Lord. If we are willing to abide by God's words even to the point where we suffer because of it, we will be richly blessed.

c. Isaac gave up his rights

Isaac was able to give up the wells because he did not place emphasis on his

rights or material gain. In God's sight it is far better to give up our will, our benefits, and our wealth, (which may seem rightfully ours) for the sake of preserving peace and obeying God. Sometimes we maintain a death grip on the things we do not want to lose. However, we have to learn to relax and understand that if it is ours, God will arrange for us to have it. If it is not meant to be ours, no matter how hard we try to hold on, it will slip through our hands.

Reflection:

1. How do you normally react when faced with injustice or conflict?
2. Why was Isaac able to be meek and gentle even in the face of injustice?



Do Quiet and Meditative

Although there are many biblical references concerning Isaac, there are not many passages where Isaac speaks. We know him through his actions rather than through his words. In Genesis 24:62-63, the Bible paints a serene picture of a quiet and thoughtful man who knew the benefits of removing himself from the noise and the bustle of life to be alone with God. Why is it important to lead a quiet life, with time to reflect and meditate? After the prophet Elijah came down from Mount Carmel where he had single-handedly challenged the false prophets of Baal, he came to the entrance of Jezreel. In Israel, the city gate was the center of activity. It was a meeting place for city officials and merchants to carry out their business. No one could enter or leave the city without traveling through the gate. It was here that Elijah began to lose his focus in God and become discouraged by Jezebel's threats (1 Kgs 18:46). When we are constantly surrounded by people, our hearts and minds focus more on them and our environment than on God. Consequently, we lose our sense of direction, become frustrated and are prone to making mistakes. Therefore, let us take time each day to meditate upon God's words and reflect upon our actions, deeds and speech.

Reflection:

1. What are the benefits of daily meditation?
2. In the next week allocate some time each day to think and reflect - it could be as short as 15 minutes a day. Be sure to remove ourselves to a quiet place where we can be alone. Think about what we did during the day and examine what things we can improve upon. Meditate upon a verse or passage in the Bible or God's presence in our lives. As we develop this habit, notice the change that begins to take place.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

LIFE APPLICATION

Turning the Other Cheek



In my last column I introduced the Six Habits, a collection of handwritten advice that my Dad scrawled on an 8.5x11-inch sheet of type-writer paper. While my title is a shameless rip-off of a business bestseller, the tips are uniquely Dad's. They're nuggets of wisdom from a man who had a highly successful thirty-year career, and yet who at the same time took care of his family with love and spent much time in the service of God.

The first tip was about getting along with others: "one enemy would be too many. Be appreciative and congenial." But there are times, even when you're doing good and being the best person you can be, that people will still wrong you. What do you do then? Well, Dad covered this situation with the second tip on his list:

2) Never get mad. If someone is not nice to you, have a lot of patience. This is the time to practice being a good Christian.

The moment you start doing work that involves dealing with other people, you'll have many wonderful opportunities to start making enemies. All of us have different backgrounds, different values, and different things that drive us. And when we aren't in complete agreement with others, discord usually sets in. Sometimes we handle it well, but inevitably we'll face situations where we have enemies. And before you say that a Christian shouldn't have enemies, consider that nearly every good person in the Bible, including Christ, had them.

Human Strategies vs. Godly Solutions

I took a project-management class at my company once, and one of the topics was "Conflict Management." These classes have it down to the science; to deal with conflict, you "Compete, Avoid, Accommodate, Collaborate, or Compromise." You need to choose a conflict-management strategy based on the particular situation you're in, although there are positives and negatives to each approach. Every indi-

vidual has patterns of motivation that cause him or her to interact with others: some combination of “altruistic-nurturing”, “assertive-directing,” or “analytical-autonomizing.” These classes typically have a lot of catchy mnemonics and use lots of fancy, made-up words like “autonomizing” and “synergy.”

And yet after classes, even though you can usually recognize the unhealthy interactions and behaviors that go on around the office, you still can’t do anything about them. That’s because, try as you might, human processes and strategies sometimes can’t solve spiritual issues.

Paul gave this advice:

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:17-21).

One of the key phrases in this passage is, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you.” You can’t control what other people do, but you can control yourself. Keep a clear conscience.

Why? Read 1 Peter 3:16-17: “....So that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” One of the best ways to defeat an enemy is to do good to him after he’s gone to great lengths to make your life difficult. In reality, it’s nearly impossible for someone who doesn’t believe in God to do this. In a world where God doesn’t exist, the rule is survival of the fittest. If someone hurts you, you hurt that person back, taking special care to make sure that you hurt him more than he hurt you. If you don’t exact revenge, others will perceive you as weak, and you’ll lose credibility and power.

Someone with God in his or her heart, though, has a different perspective.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday. Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the LORD shall possess the land.

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look well at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps 37:5-11)

Dad’s Tip – Put to the Test

Strangely enough, only a few months into my job, I had the opportunity to put Dad’s second tip into action. Being an eager new employee, I went out of my way to help the company. I did my job to the fullest. On top of that, another project was under a deadline to be delivered, and since I had some expertise in that area, I stepped in and voluntarily gave up my own time to help do some work on that project.

There were rumors that the upper management was very impressed with my work. One day, one of the higher-uppers came in to our location, but I happened to be in a class that day. When I got out of the class, I found out that the colleague of mine who sat in the desk across from me was given—and accepted—the credit for the work I had done. And in all his discussions with the manager, my name was never even mentioned.

He was given a promotion, a nice job and his own office. To add insult to injury, the job he got was pretty much my dream job, one that I was uniquely qualified to do! And in the meantime, my own job became more and more tedious and thankless.

So I had a choice. I had every right to publicly accuse this person of taking credit for my work. I could have stormed into the boss’ office and made a scene, and I would’ve been justified. Most of my colleagues knew full well what really happened, so I could have rounded them up as witnesses to accuse the one who took credit for my work. But I didn’t.

Now, I didn’t just sit back and just take it either. I wrote an e-mail to the manager who had promoted my colleague. It wasn’t a scathing letter, nor did I accuse or complain. But, in a very Christian way, I told her objectively and professionally my feelings about what had transpired. And through it all, I took great pains to show respect—for this manager, for my colleague, and also for myself. Before I did that, of course, I prayed that God would give me the wisdom to be genuine.

As is my custom with this type of e-mail, I waited twenty-four hours, read it over again, and then sent it off. But I heard nothing back for months. It hurt. Bad. In my mind I tried to comfort myself by repeating over and over again the story of Isaac

and the wells, which I've heard at so many Student Spiritual Convocations.

But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of springing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and over that they did not quarrel; so he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen 26:19-22).

"Isaac was a chump," I'd grumble. Well, if you read on in that passage, you'll find that Isaac went up to Beersheba that night, where the Lord appeared to him and reminded him of the blessing He had spoken to Abraham. The same blessing applies to us: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Of course I'm no Isaac, but a funny thing happened. A few months later, that manager was about to leave her job. But she did one last thing before she left; she gave me a call to tell me that my coworker wasn't working out in his new job. He was struggling and she regretted the decision to promote him. She asked if I would like the position, and I accepted. A little while later, the coworker gave me a call. He acknowledged that I was the right person for the job. I ended up doing that job for a few years and doing it well. If I had ranted and raved back when the offense took place, I would have lost the respect of everyone. But the fact that I kept quiet, when everyone knew I had every right to rant and rave, showed character.

When the Pharisee came up to Jesus and tried to goad Him into saying something rash or losing His temper, He invariably replied with a soft answer. He had every right to shout and scream. He was accused of doing miracles through Beelzebub. He was accused of cavorting with "tax collectors and sinners." He was accused of brazenly breaking the traditions of the elders and the Law. But each time, He chose to reply with patience and without resentment. And each time, the Pharisees were left speechless and frustrated.

In my few years at my company, this sort of thing happened to me several times. Each time, I responded with meekness. And each time, the person who wronged me ultimately ended up with egg on his face. Or, to use the Bible's term, "burning coals." Meekness is not the same as weakness. Mr. Webster defines meekness as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." It's a choice—one that arises not out of a lack of one's own power, but from an abundance of God's power and complete trust that God is there and knows what He's doing.

Paul's advice in Romans 12:20, which he quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22 sums up what all the fancy corporate training courses could not; how to truly resolve a conflict. The next time you encounter a situation where you are slandered, misrepresented, or plain taken advantage of, try putting Dad's advice to the test. Repay evil with love. Then sit back, and let the Lord do His work.

"Six Habits of Really Effective Christians (Part 2)," *Manna* Issue 32 July–Sep 2000, p 49.

Discussion:

1. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). How can we marry society's view of "standing up for yourself" with the biblical view? Where do we draw the line?
2. How can we cultivate this virtue in our daily lives? (believe in the power of God, be willing to sacrifice, don't regard material goods too highly, think of the positives, be more far-sighted in thought)
3. Which of these areas are you most likely to face conflicts— in the family, at school, with friends or the general public?
4. Think of a situation where you were in conflict with others. How did you respond? What did you learn from the experience?

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Our Lord Jesus is a paragon of true meekness and submission. He said, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Mt 11:29). Indeed, even when the greatest injustice was laid upon Him, when He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth (Is 53:7). Because of His obedience and meekness the Lord not only gained the hearts of the people then, but He continues to win the hearts of people today. Strive, therefore, for meekness and to be at peace with all men.