

Week Two: Grateful people view the future with optimism
Romans 4:18 (See also Genesis 17:15-17)

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Romans 4:18. How would you express that verse using your own words?
2. The paraphrase called The Message Bible puts it this way: *“When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on the basis of what God said He would do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, “You’re going to have a big family, Abraham!”* Do you like Peterson’s paraphrase?
3. How did Paul describe the reality of Abraham’s situation? What do you desire in life that seems impossible at the moment?
4. Read 1 John 5:14-15. In his famous book, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People,” Rabbi Kushner said there are some things that even God can’t do. Based on this passage, do you agree?
5. According to the 1 John 5:14-15 passage, why does God sometimes not grant our prayers? What does that tell you about God?
6. When should you quit asking God to do the impossible?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater faith to ask for and expect miracles.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read James 4:1-3. What insight does James offer about unanswered prayer?
9. What two reasons does James give for needs that go unmet by God?
10. Recite (or read) the Lord’s Prayer. How many of the 7 petitions in Jesus’ prayer focus on material things? What does that suggest should dominate our prayer focus?
11. What spiritual issue in your life has been the most consistent focus of your prayers?
12. Do you pray mostly for yourself or others? Who and what do you pray for when you pray for others?

13. Do you think prayer is mostly an exercise in the devotional thought and meditation, or is it an action you take to engage God in life?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a change in your life that would be to the benefit of others and not yourself.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at Romans 4:18. Abraham's confidence was based on a promise that had been made to him by God. Can you name one promise God has made to you?
16. Read John 14:10-14. What promise did Jesus make to His followers? Does that apply to you?
17. Do you believe in modern day miracles? Have you ever seen a miracle in response to a dire circumstance or as the result of a prayer? Explain.
18. Read Genesis 17:15-17. What was the miracle God promised Abraham?
19. Why was that miracle so hard for Abraham to believe?
20. Read Hebrews 11:8-12. How does Paul describe the impossibility of Abraham's miracle?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray silently for something that you believe could forever change your life and your usefulness to God that seems utterly impossible.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Are you a "glass half full" or a "glass half empty" person?
23. Do you think your family of origin is mostly responsible for your degree of optimism in life, or is it more on the basis of your own DNA and life experience? Nature or nurture?
24. Is it possible for a realist to become an optimist? Why or why not?
25. Read James 1:5-8. What is the essential quality James urges in prayer? Why is that so important?

26. Do you think most of Jesus' miracles were the result of his Godly nature, or because he was a "true man" of extraordinary faith and more fully aware of most of His Father's will for His life and for the world?
27. Have you ever fasted to help you focus on a key prayer issue? If not, maybe you should try that in a manageable way. (Remember, there is no special power associated with fasting, except to help you focus and be mindful of a matter you are keeping before the Lord in prayer.)
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more confident spirit in prayer.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read Romans 4:1-3. What does it mean when Paul says that Abraham had no reason to brag before God?
30. Compare this passage to James 5:17-18. Were these men of the Bible special in any way? Explain.
31. What lesson(s) can we derive from their example?
32. Read again Romans 5:3. What gave Abraham confidence to expect a miracle from God? Are you blessed to possess that same reason for confidence, or was it unique to Abraham?
33. How much do you know about Abraham's life? Does the Bible describe any weaknesses in Abraham, or does it seem he was above our human nature? You may need to scan Genesis chapters 12 through 17 to discern your answer.
34. If Abraham was used by God and declared the father of faith, despite his sinful nature, what hope does that hold for you? Do you believe God has a divine purpose for your life? Why or why not?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater clarity about the unique way you might serve God that is different from all the other Christians you know.