



#Struggles... The Pathway to Growth
Stories of Redemption/Restoration from the Old Testament
Teaching Series – Spring / Summer 2016

Many are facing huge challenges: long-term health issues both physical and emotional, grief and sorrow, a history of abusive relationships, dreams thwarted, busy daily lives or the just the challenge of holding onto and proclaiming the Christian faith to an increasingly hostile and indifferent society.

The main aim of this teaching series is to introduce key figures from the Old Testament, to bring their stories alive and to re-ignite a desire to read these valuable scriptures. Within these key stories of faith there are many struggles that are relevant to our lives today, and there is much to learn from, and be encouraged by, as the story of a loving Father's response and faithfulness is revealed in their stories.

Each character displays a – sometimes reluctant – willingness, to serve and follow their God, discern His call on their lives, and overcome their own personal struggles of self-doubt, sin, fear and seemingly insurmountable barriers.

***Martin Luther King, Jr.** “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”*

Sunday 24th April Sarah & Abraham Speaker – Will Ross

The struggle to believe God's promises against all the odds.

Abram is the first to trust God's promises against all the odds. From now on, faith means believing what God says. The simple trust in God's word counts as righteousness – being right with God. He wandered in an unknown land, worshipped an invisible God and believed in a yet to be fulfilled promise.

Genesis 18:1-15 The Lord promises Abraham that Sarah will bear a son. 'Sarah, who should by now have been in an old folks home rather than anti natal class'. The emphasis of the story is the helplessness of Sarah in old age. Why else would Abraham's divine visitor say 'Is anything too hard for the Lord' Genesis 18:14

God shows in Abraham's life what he can do in every life, but He can only work where there is faith.

Abraham, a man who lied about his wife, laughed at God's promise, but is held up as the paragon of faith, James 2:20-26, made all kinds of mistakes, yet he believed God enough so when God said, 'Go' he went.

Sunday 1st May

Gideon

Speaker – Erin Allen

The struggle to believe God's call - Are you the solution to a problem?

Called to be a mighty warrior whilst threshing wheat in an underground cellar. Commissioned to be Israel's deliverer – although he explains that he is a very junior member of a very weak clan. God's calls Gideon by how God sees him, as a mighty warrior – Gideon seeks God's guidance in an unusual way, by laying out a fleece overnight, once demanding that the fleece remain dry whilst the ground is wet and the next night the other way round.

Judges 6: 11b-14

What insecurities prevent you from seeing yourself as God See you? Are you determined by your view of yourself of God's view of you?

Gideon did not see himself as part of the solution, yet God said 'I am sending you'. *'When you notice that things are not working – it is often because God wants you to be part of the solution'* -Tom Holladay Saddleback.

Determine your capacity?

Judges 7:2 leaning on the resources of God to accomplish what God wants to accomplish – God was already undermining the moral of the Midianites by sending them dreams of defeat.

Sunday 8th May

Jacob/Israel

Speaker – Will Ross

The struggle for a new identity

Jacob 'took by the heel' is cunning and hardworking, the underdog who somehow comes out on top – but God blesses Him, in due course he will be renamed Israel 'wrestled' and give his name to a nation.

Jacob is a man who will never give up, and nor will the people who descend from him. At Bethel he negotiates a promise with and from God, and in Genesis 32:1-33:20 Jacob faces massacre. He begs God to keep his promise and protect them. Jacob is in torment, all night he wrestles with someone – a dark angel, or his fear of death, or his uneasy conscience. Jacob clings on despite the opponent dislocating his hip. He won't let go with a blessing to resolve the conflict.

Jacob comes of age, in this crisis, 'The Dark night of the soul' as he struggles with Esau and God, past and future, fear and faith. He wins through to a new identity and peace. He eventually settles just a short distance away from Bethel, where his long journey of faith began.

Sunday 22nd May

Moses

Speaker– Will Ross

The struggle with low self-esteem - Are you ready to Trust God?

'You do not need to be capable to be used by God, just willing to trust God will work through you'

Exodus 3: 1-10 – Moses dialogue with God, displays a man, who despite his connections, education and background is insecure and lacking in confidence. Who am I? What do I say? I am not good with words? I am slow of speech? And eventually admits that he simply does not want to respond – isn't good at leadership, no-one will believe him and he is happy where he is!

Exodus 4:10-13

Moses had many areas of self-doubt and each time God answer was the same. I will lead you. Have faith and be obedient, God also agreed that Moses' brother Aaron will assist him and speak for him.

Moses was the greatest leader Israel ever had. Despite his sense of inadequacy, he accepted God's call to confront Pharaoh and head up the exodus. In a quiet self-effacing way, he discerned God's will and made it known to others. He encountered all kinds of difficulty and discouragement during the trek across the desert – he met every crisis with passion and prayer. His enduring achievement was that he received the revelation of God's law, and made every effort to record it, teach it and establish it for generations.

Sunday 29th May

Abigail

Speaker – to be decided

The Struggle for Integrity in the face of adversity

Abigail, is described as both beautiful and intelligent – an unusual accolade for a women of the OT! Her name means 'my father's happiness' (*many wonderful possibilities here to expand and draw parallels between the pleasure her behavior brings to both her earthly and heavenly father!*)

Probably given (or bought) in marriage to Nabal, a rich, foolish and senseless man, whose behavior towards David would have undoubtedly caused the certain death of his whole household if Abigail had not intervened.

Abigail, as Nabal's wife had the subservient role but was obviously seen as the source of wisdom and reason within the household. She had built relationship, trust and made the very best of the resources she had available to her – and displayed courage in the face of danger and proceeded to protect a husband who had done nothing to earn her loyalty or respect.

James 3: 13-18 True Wisdom: A good life, by deeds done in humility. Without envy and selfish ambition, pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit.

Abigail did not shy away from the truth when describing Nabal to David, and seemingly flew in the face of conventional submissive behavior – but it was to save her husband and household from certain destruction. Her honest confession to Nabal of events could have been disastrous for her but for the Lord's intervention, which left her free at last.

Throughout the brief account we read of a woman who was resourceful, brave and full of integrity and truth.

Sunday 5th June

Job

Speaker – Peter Lane

The struggle of suffering - When there is no understanding

One of the world's greatest poems.

Does suffering come because we have done something to deserve it? Is it God's punishment for sins?

The advice of friends?

Eliphaz – Believes in the holiness of God. Have you done something to deserve this punishment? Examine yourself.

Bildad – God is a just God? God would never reject a blameless person – it would be against his nature to do so. Put right what you have done wrong.

Zophar – Whatever God does is right and there can be no appeal.

Eilhu – What is God doing in us?

Job 42: 1-17 Job submits to God, silenced by God's majesty and unsearchable wisdom. God restores to Job all that is lost and asks Job to pray for his friends ' The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective' James 5:16

The Struggle of Waiting for God’s intervention

The story of Esther in the Bible is truly an incredible one: action-packed full of drama and deception, power plays and surprising twists, the book presents us with a heroine who overcomes struggle in such a remarkable way as to save the entire Jewish nation from a very real threat of extermination.

What we often forget is that Esther had to act as if she was something she was not for 9 whole years - as queen of Persia, she did not tell her king and husband she was Jewish until she needed to do something drastic to save her people. How long do we usually wait if we are anxious to do something? How difficult is it for us to continue to trust God in ALL our circumstances if He is not working in the way in which we would like him to work?

When crisis hit the Jewish nation - a threat of extermination from a Persian official’s plot against them, it was time for Esther to act - and for her to depend on God for his intervention in the Jewish people’s circumstances.

From reading the story, we cannot know how difficult it was for Esther to keep her religion and therefore identity quiet...to see her dear uncle Mordecai in distress and under threat from the empire, or to adopt an entirely new culture and way of life as queen. She went about her life and her circumstances with grace, earning respect by who she was and how she lived.

But it was exactly within these years of quiet that God was building courage and wit in this incredible woman in order for her to be used by God to save God’s people....‘for such a time as this.’
