

#lifttour22

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Greetings Student Pastor, Youth Pastor, Youth Ministry Leader & Educator,

I wanted to take a moment and thank each one of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be a part of this epic event for the weekend. I'm extremely grateful that you would allow us to partner with you to help facilitate a spiritual encounter between your students and Jesus. I honor you for dedicating your time and energy! This weekend could not happen without you! Our team has been diligently praying for your students. It is our hope this weekend will change their lives forever.

In planning for our time together, we've worked meticulously through the details to ensure your students will have the best experience. Our sole purpose this weekend is to intentionally create an environment where students can exalt Christ, engage Scripture, and be equipped with the necessary tools to passionately pursue Christ. To help create flow and synergy, we feel it is important that what happens in the large group environment carries over into the small group sessions. During each large group session, the Gospel will be presented in a clear, creative, and relevant way.

The small group sessions will consist of a list of discussion questions that will help you facilitate and cultivate a healthy dialog with your students. Please know, these questions are only a "guide" for the weekend. You know your students, so feel free to contextualize any of these questions as you deem necessary. We encourage you to take plenty of notes while listening to the sermons and ask God to give you a few points of discussion for each small group session. If you don't complete all the small group sessions because the conversation is rich and eventful, it is totally okay. The goal is not to complete the questions for the sake of accomplishment, but instead, the goal is to create connections that will lead to application. Be open and receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As you spend time with your students, pray that they will provide "God moments" where you can engage them in spiritual conversations that will lead to discussions concerning their salvation.

Important: During one or two of the sessions, our communicators will extend a public invitation and give your students an opportunity to respond. Our desire is to inspire and encourage your students to experience a personal relationship with Jesus. We want every participant to fully

understand what it means to live redeemed. This invitation will not feel manipulative or come across as inauthentic. While the invitation is being presented, please be prepared to receive your students, and counsel them. We want to make sure every student understands the decision they are making. Our entire team is praying to see God change lives forever this weekend! Thank you for allowing us to serve you and your students!

Praying for you always,

**Jeff Wallace**

Executive Director of the LIFT Tour

# 2022 LIFT Tour Theme: POSSIBLE

We are emerging from the long dark winter that was Covid-19 like someone stepping from a dimly lit room into a bright sun-shiny day. Standing in the rubble of what the pandemic left behind is a bit strange, a bit like the first day of school for the kid that just moved from out of town. For many it can be a place of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, burnout, and the list can just go on and on. But for the redeemed it's a place where love makes a God-blessed future POSSIBLE. At The Lift Tour 22 we are discovering all the possibilities of what could be for the glory of God...that is, for those are willing to rediscover a truth from the past: "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." Matthew 19:26, NLT

The Good News of Jesus makes so much possible. To discover what is POSSIBLE and better understand this Good News, we are going to take a deep dive into one of the most fascinating events in the Old Testament: Genesis 22. It is here that Abraham is going to face an impossible situation, that is actually a test, and in the end, he will discover "nothing will be impossible with God". Luke 1:37, ESV

## **A little back story on Abraham:**

The story of Abraham occurs early in the stages of redemptive history. He lived during a time of great idolatry where his countrymen worshipped the sun, fire, moon, stars and various forces of nature. And yet in the midst of this idolatrous culture, Abraham believed in the one true God. In Genesis 12:1-3, God makes a covenant with Abraham and calls him to leave his homeland of Haran and go to a new land. This covenant included promises to show him a land, make him a great nation, and use that nation to bless the whole world. Abraham was now God's representative and through him would come the Jewish nation, the Bible and the Savior. To make Abraham a great nation and a nation that would bless the world, he would obviously need to have offspring to carry this covenant out. Thus, in Genesis 17:21, God tells Abraham that it is through Isaac, a son Sarah will have, that He will carry His promises out. Then, in Genesis 22 we have one of the most memorable narratives regarding Abraham as he demonstrates his willingness to be obedient to God no matter the request. It is here that Abraham discovers the words of Jesus spoken in Matthew 19:26, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible" (NLT).

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## **Practical Instructions for Facilitating Discussion:**

- Remember, you can never teach a person anything; you can only help them discover it. This is the



purpose of the discussion questions. It is an opportunity for you to guide the students to discover the truths revealed in the passages. This is most effective when they are given the opportunity to answer the questions rather than being spoon-fed the answers.

- You can follow the curriculum just as it is laid out. 1) Read the passage - allow students to read as much as possible. 2) Present the discussion questions. Allow time for students to come up with the answer. If it's quiet at first, it's likely that they are thinking. This is what you want.
- After they have given their answers, you can share your own. Don't get caught up or waste a lot of time on a question they may not understand. Just go on to the next question.
- There is not necessarily one right answer for each question; however, you want to listen to the answers. This will help you get an idea of the level of understanding for each student who participates.
- Don't ignore wrong answers, but do your best to be diplomatic in pointing toward the truth. You can say something like, "Hmmm, that's an interesting thought, but what if we look at it this way." You want to do your best not to embarrass anyone, but some in your group may not know the Lord as Savior. You want to listen carefully if their answers reflect that.

## The Lift Tour 2022 Theme

# POSSIBLE

*Creating the future by rediscovering the past*

## Introduction:

"If something is not impossible, then there must be a way to do it."

If anything, Nicholas Winton proves that ordinary people with extraordinary attitudes can change the brokenness of this world. Truth be known, the world wouldn't know his name were it not for a scrapbook created by a volunteer assistant all those years ago.

But I get ahead of myself.

The world was a powder keg in the mid-to-late-1930's, and Adolph Hitler's Third Reich seemed all too happy to provide both the powder and the match to light it. Rarely before has a word become so synonymous with evil as the term 'Nazi.' Before his rise to power, few believed that Hitler was more than a ranting evil lunatic appealing to a faction of uninformed, disgruntled, or a sadistically misguided portion of the general population. After all, the Nazi party was young and had only formed from 1919 to 1922 following WWI. Their leading platform was driven by a type of nationalism that was extremely racist. Furthermore, they sought to eradicate communism and establish a system of national socialism. As insane as it may sound today, on January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler was democratically elected chancellor of Germany through the nation's governmental structure. He burned, killed, outlawed, consolidated, and viciously bullied his way to a dictatorship from that point onward. The wave of the Third Reich was crashing against the shores of any German opponent as he positioned his new regime to fulfill his vision for the future. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, it was a "spectacle of a civilized society disintegrating into barbarianism."<sup>1</sup>

But this story isn't about Hitler and back to Mr. Winton.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Berlin:1932-1933. L.L. Rasmussen, Editor's Introduction to the English Edition (DBW 12; ed. I. Best, D Higgins and D.W. Stott; Translated by C Nicolaisen and E. Scharffenorth.) Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009., 3.

In 1938 Nicholas Winton was a successful businessman working as a broker for the London Stock Exchange. He followed in his father's footsteps, who likewise had enjoyed a very successful career in banking. His family was of German-Jewish ancestry and had immigrated to England at the turn of the century. At age twenty-nine, he was single and excited about a two-week vacation during the Christmas holidays. He and a friend, Martin Blake, had planned to spend the time skiing in Switzerland. Like so many others at that time, the two men watched as Germany became a society disintegrating into barbarianism. Martin had gone to Czechoslovakia and observed the mass amounts of displaced Jewish families due to that country's German occupation. He extended an invitation to his friend Nicholas to join him. This request and Winton's response would be the groundswell of what would come to be a worthy and world-changing cause.

In the refugee camps surrounding Prague, a significant problem emerged that galvanized a group of volunteers, that included Winton. It became their single focus in the months and days leading up to the beginning of WWII. While there were programs well underway to rescue Jewish children from Germany and Austria, there was no similar effort for Czechoslovakia's children. To this end, a small group of volunteers organized and strategized to create a way for Czech children who were Jewish to escape the Third Reich's evil wave that would soon come crashing down on that country.

There are times in history where the immediate needs cannot wait on governmental assistance or certain committees to take up a cause. Thus, before he was even granted permission, Winton established the 'British Committee for Refugees' in Czechoslovakia. He even set up an office and began to meet with families eager to find a way to save their children from the impending doom they so feared. Thousands of families responded as applications were processed. Winton spent a month in Prague before returning to Britain to continue the work. Six weeks later, Germany occupied Czechoslovakia, and the time was now a luxury Jewish families and children could no longer afford.

With the operation running at maximum capacity, Winton was doing everything he could to secure safe passage for as many children as possible. This included bribes when necessary, in Prague, to keep the authorities from asking too many questions about the thousands of families seeking help. Back in Britain, he took children's names to British authorities to ensure entry to the country. Furthermore, he secured foster homes for each child, organized and arranged trains, and raised the expenses to transport the children, and when there weren't enough funds, he paid from his personal account. On more than one occasion, documents were forged to transport children out of Prague and into Britain. Winton's daughter wrote

concerning this aspect of her dad's personality, "Having quickly discovered how slowly bureaucratic committees can progress, he was determined that working outside them would facilitate his aims."<sup>2</sup>

The first transport was about twenty children and by all indications was the only time a plane was used to bring the children to Britain. From March to August, eight more transports, all by train, carried children away to safety. In August, three trains transported children, including one that brought 241, the largest number to date in the operation. A ninth transport was scheduled for September 1, 1939. The date came, and 250 children prepared to board. Sadly, this was also the day that Germany invaded Poland, and all borders were closed. Two days later, Britain declared war on Germany. The train was thus canceled. It is believed that nearly all the children scheduled to be on the ninth train died during the war, most of them in concentration camps.

All in all, Nicholas Winton saved 669 children from the Holocaust. Very few would ever see their parents again and were raised by their adopted families. After serving himself in the war, he would continue to rebuild war-torn Europe through his banking profession. He fell in love with Grete Gjelstrup, a Danish girl who was an accountant while working in Paris. The two were married in October of 1948. Nicholas and Grete had three children, and by all accounts, deeply loved each other. Grete died on August 28, 1999, with two of her children holding her hands. Nicholas had gone home for the night to sleep when he awoke and was given the sad news that the fifty-three-year love affair had ended.

### **Remember the scrapbook?**

When the war broke out, the operation to rescue children came to a close. Nine months of working at a fever pitch and to the point of exhaustion suddenly came to a stop. This was when a volunteer named Mr. W.M. Loewinsohn gathered all the data, including names, pictures, correspondence, and anything else relevant to their activities, and put them together in a scrapbook. The scrapbook was presented to Nicholas as a memento of all that they had accomplished together.

It was a beautiful gift, but one that would collect dust for nearly fifty years. It was eventually placed in the attic of the Winton's home. Nicholas didn't speak of his efforts to rescue the children; thus, there were hundreds of children who had no idea who or how they had been rescued in those fateful months leading up to the war. One day Grete was up in the attic and came across the scrapbook. Taken back by how well the efforts had been chronicled, she thought it might help those attempting to retrace the lives lost during

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<sup>2</sup> Winton, Barbara. *If it's Not Impossible*. Padstow, Cornwall: Troubadour Publishing Ltd., 2014., 24.

WWII. She eventually connected with a Holocaust researcher who was married to a man involved in the media. The story found its way to a popular BBC television show where, in 1988, Nicholas Winton was invited to be part of a studio audience. He had no idea that night that the rest of the audience were part of the children, now in their 50's and 60's, whom he had rescued so many years earlier. The scrapbook was discussed by the host of the show *That's Life*, and then the emotional moment came when the audience was identified to Nicholas and Grete. It was the first time these children learned of the person who had saved their lives.

Nicholas Winton would receive worldwide recognition following the television show. He was given honors, a planet was named after him, the highest honor possible by the Czechoslovakia government, and he was knighted by the Queen. But the limelight and attention was never something he sought out, or at times enjoyed. He mostly spoke of the other volunteers who also worked so tirelessly to save the children. You see, it really was about the children. It was about tackling what seemed like an impossible task simply because it needed to be done. Because of the 669 documented children, Nicholas Winton helped rescue, there are now over 6000 people alive today. Winton was known to his friends and family as 'Nicky'; those he has rescued call themselves 'Nicky's Children.'

During the nine-month struggle to effect change and save the children, Nicky began to articulate what would become his life's mantra: "If something is not impossible, then there must be a way to do it." After observing so many children in harm's way and knowing that there was another environment where they could be safe, meaning that the seemingly impossible was actually possible. Just because the way is hidden doesn't mean it isn't there. Just because a madman has an army doesn't mean he can't be opposed. And just because no one else has figured out a way to save the Czech Jewish children living in refugee camps doesn't mean that a solution can't be found. And it didn't require a hero or heroine. The injustice simply needed someone with good character and the right attitude. An attitude that continually believed, "there must be a way." This is why Nicky would disagree with anyone who referred to him as great throughout the rest of his life. He lived to be 106 and died in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Nicholas Winton was living proof that even in the darkest of times, better days and even a redeemed story is possible. While Winton was not an outspoken Christian, as followers of Jesus his story still encourages us...

- to believe that the darkness around us is not as good as it gets

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<sup>3</sup> To know more about Sir Nicholas Winton, I strongly encourage you to read *If it's Not Impossible* by Barbara Winton (daughter of Nicholas and Grete Winton).



- to imagine a way forward that pursues God's wants for God's world
- to tell a story that has redemption as its central theme
- to experience the Redeemer and how with him all things are POSSIBLE

[illegible]

# SESSION 1:

It is **POSSIBLE** to experience God's love...*when we know  
God intimately and trust him completely* (Genesis 22:1-13)

In Genesis 22:1, the Bible says that "God tested Abraham..."

The Hebrew verb nissah, translated as tested, means "to prove the quality of," not "to entice to do wrong." God used this event to affirm the sterling character of Abraham's faith by giving him the incredibly difficult task of sacrificing his son Isaac in the land of Moriah, i.e., the Jerusalem area (2 Ch 3:1).<sup>4</sup>

And what a test it was! Abraham was to get up the next morning, take his son, whom he loved with all his being and had waited so many years for, and sacrifice him to the Lord. Can you imagine that sleepless night? Did he tell Sarah or did he just lay there wondering why God gave him a son in the first place only to have his own father put him to death. I imagine that while he lay in bed that night, he pondered his journey of faith that had led to this moment. Like other Bible characters, Abraham's journey was a bit of a mixed bag with both successes and failures. And certainly, this wasn't the first test he had faced.

As he lay awake through the night, I wonder if he reflected on many tests faced throughout his journey of faith. The first, which he passed, occurs when God asked him to leave his family and his country and to go to a land that He would show him (Genesis 11:27-12:5). The second test, that he fails, occurs when a famine came to the land and Abraham took Sarah to Egypt to escape it. Before entering the land, Abraham conjured up a lie saying he was Sarah's brother instead of her husband so that he would not be killed (Genesis 12:10-13:4). The third test, which he passed, came when Abraham generously gave Lot first choice of pastureland (Genesis 13:5-18). He also passed tests when he defeated kings (Genesis 14:1-16) and when he said no to riches from King Sodom (Genesis 14:17-24). He would again fail a test when Sarah became impatient because she had not borne him a child, and advocated he have sex with her maidservant Hagar (Genesis 16). He would in turn pass a test to send his son, Ishmael, the child born from Hagar as a result of their relations, away even though it broke his heart (Genesis 21:14-21).

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<sup>4</sup> Bergen, R. D. (2017). Genesis. In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (p. 41). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

“God’s testings are tailor-made for each child of God, and each experience is unique...In one sense, it is a compliment when God sends us a test; it shows God wants to “promote us”...God never sends a test until He knows you are ready for it.”<sup>5</sup> And now, Abraham finds himself facing the toughest of all tests, to kill his only son, his son that he had spent years protecting and caring for.

In any case, somewhere in the sleepless night, or maybe during the three-day journey that would follow, Abraham resolved to faithfully obey God, rather than try to save his son’s life. He was determined to live out his days knowing God intimately and trusting him completely. As we read the text/narrative we are given a portrait of Abraham trusting God and then experiencing God’s sufficiency in a miraculous and beautiful manner. Our text helps to shape three questions for those who want to know God and experience his sufficiency.

## Question # 1: Are you willing to listen to God?

*Sometime later, God tested Abraham’s faith. “Abraham!” God called. “Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.”<sup>2</sup> “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.”*

## Question # 2: Are you willing to trust God with what you love and care about on this earth?

*<sup>3</sup> The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. <sup>4</sup> On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> “Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.” <sup>6</sup> So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac turned to Abraham and said, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “We have the fire and the wood,” the boy said, “but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup> “God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.*

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<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). Be Obedient (p. 109). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

### Question # 3: Are you willing to follow God and be obedient even when times are tough, and circumstances don't make sense?

<sup>9</sup>When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. <sup>11</sup>At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" <sup>12</sup>"Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son." <sup>13</sup>Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

### Conclusion:

It is possible to experience God's love, in fact God's love has made it possible through the person and work of Jesus to know him intimately and trust him completely. Throughout this Genesis 22:1-13 we observe Abraham:

- Listening to God's instructions
- Trusting God with what he loved most in this world, i.e., his son Isaac
- And yet, even when being obedient to God's commands, when they were impossible to understand, and incredibly difficult to obey...Abraham chose to trust God who has authority over every moment, with a seemingly absurd request that was beyond what he could humanly comprehend.

In a later session we will discover how, because of Abraham's obedience, "all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). We will see that this is all a part of God's ultimate plan so that "a child will be born for us, and a son will be given to us" (Isaiah 9:6). And that child (speaking of his humanity), who was also a son (speaking of his deity), would be the only two hundred percent being in the history of the universe. You see, Jesus is one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God. John would declare of him, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) And 2 Corinthians 5:21 teaches us the purpose of it all: "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."



Abraham's story is part of a larger, grander narrative unfolding so that on this night we may be able to:

1. Listen to what Jesus wants
2. Trust Jesus with all that we love and care about
3. And follow Jesus on all the good and all the bad days

### Small group questions:

1. Reflecting on session 1, what point had the greatest impact on you?
2. Has there ever been a time in your life when you "passed" a test God gave you? How did you celebrate that moment?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life when you "failed" a test God gave you? How did you respond in that moment?
4. What is something or someone you have trouble fully surrendering to God? What's your Isaac?
5. Have you ever experienced God asking you to do something that you didn't understand, or you felt was too difficult? How did you respond?

## QUESTION 1

# SESSION 2:

**It is POSSIBLE to understand God's love...when we believe 'the LORD will provide'  
(Genesis 22:13-14)**

*<sup>13</sup> Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.<sup>14</sup> Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

On day three of the journey, Abraham saw "the place" off in the distance where he was to go and make the sacrifice to God. Then Abraham turns to the two young men who had accompanied them thus far and made a phenomenal and prophetic statement:

*Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."*

Genesis 22:5

What a beautiful picture of Abraham trusting God and Isaac trusting Abraham! What did this statement mean? Was Abraham simply telling a white lie to cover up "the true nature of the sacrifice?" Was he going to disobey God and therefore this statement was an indication that he was going not going to go through with it? Or finally, is this statement an indication of Abraham's faith in God that even though he had been told to sacrifice Isaac, somehow God was going to keep the covenant made to him through Isaac (Genesis 17:21). The writer of Hebrews gives us a great insight into what this statement meant:

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

Hebrews 11:17-19

When Abraham declared this to be hallowed ground henceforth known as "the LORD will provide", he was invoking an actual name for God: "Yahweh-yireh." Yahweh is the personal name of Israel's covenant God in

the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Daniel Akin explains how it often “occurs in its shortened form, Yah (Exodus 15:12; 17:16), and in various combinations: Yehosua, “Yahweh is salvation” (Joshua 1:1); Yokebed, “Yahweh is glory” (Numbers 26:59); “Yahweh will provide” (Genesis 22:14); “Yahweh my banner” (Exodus 17:15-16); “Yahweh our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16).<sup>7</sup> Yahweh is derives from a word meaning “to be”. God explains his name to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15 this way:

God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

This is my eternal name,  
my name to remember for all generations.

Let’s now come back back to the event that we are studying in Genesis 22. Abraham teaches us that God’s name actually communicates God’s message. With that in mind, the name ‘Yahweh-yireh’, which communicates the message “the LORD will provide”, has now come into full view as the enduring theme of the entire chapter:

- Abraham’s obedient response to take his son to a distant land to be sacrificed meant that he was still trusting God to provide by keeping his promise to bless him and all his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3).
- Abraham’s statement to his servants “we will come right back” meant that he believed God would provide a way for his son to live, even if that meant bringing him back from the dead.
- Abraham’s naming the mountain “the LORD will provide” followed by the statement: “To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” meant he wanted all to know that God is faithful to his people and will provide from generation to generation.

The question now becomes, how does “the LORD will provide” help us to understand God’s love? Quite simply put, this entire event is a foreshadowing of “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).

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<sup>6</sup> Shields, M. A., & Hawkins, R. K. (2016). YHWH. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>7</sup> *A Theology For The Church* by Daniel L. Akin p. 192

Therefore, the question can be answered in two ways. First, the land of Moriah is the region that would be home to the future city of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1).<sup>8</sup> In other words, Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac in the same place that God's only Son would one day be sacrificed for the sins of mankind. Second, the first time 'love' is mentioned in the Bible, a father is being asked to sacrifice his only son, who he loved so much (Genesis 22:2). In other words, we cannot understand the love of God the Father without understanding the sacrifice of his son Jesus. God's ultimate provision for our lives is God's enduring presence in our lives, this is accomplished through the person and work of Christ Jesus, our Lord:

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Romans 5:6-8

I love the phrase "at just the right time" because it was at just the right time that a ram got caught in a thicket of thorns. God always provides at just the right time, and God's provision is how we understand his love.

Therefore, how has God's provision for our lives made it possible to understand God's love for us?

## **1. God's provision...which makes it possible to experience God's love... is demonstrated through the sacrifice of Jesus (parallel idea seen in Genesis 22:13)**

*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Romans 5:8

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<sup>8</sup> Bergen, R. D. (2017). [Genesis](#). In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (p. 41). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



## 2. Trusting God's provision, the person and work of Jesus, is how we know God's sufficiency and experience his peace (parallel idea seen in Genesis 22:14)

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Hebrews 13:8

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

Romans 8:28

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6-7

## 3. Celebrating God's provision, the Good News of Jesus, is how we live our best life (parallel idea seen in Genesis 22:14)

*You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.*

1 Peter 8-9

*For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.*

Romans 11:36

## Conclusion:

God's name communicates God's message, and this is miraculously demonstrated with Jesus Christ. "So, the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son" (John 1:14) ... "God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ" (v. 17). The name 'Jesus' is a Greek name, and the Hebrew equivalent would be 'Jeshua' or 'Joshua' meaning 'to deliver' or 'to rescue'. In Matthew 1:21 his name is given a very specific meaning: "And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." The name 'Christ' means 'anointed one' and speaks of his title as the Messiah. 'Messiah' is a transliteration of Hebrew word meaning "anointed one" that was translated into Greek as Christos.<sup>9</sup> Therefore 'Christ' and 'Messiah' can be used interchangeably.

With that in mind, let's go back to the idea that God's name communicates God's message. For Abraham 'Yahweh-yireh' communicated that God would provide a way where there seemed to be no way. Maybe another way of saying it is: "What is impossible for people is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). The name Jesus Christ communicates that he is the anointed one who would redeem and thus deliver his people from the captivity of sin and punishment of death. Or maybe another, and far better, way of saying it is:

*Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.*

John 8:34-36

In conclusion, God's provision makes it possible for us to understand and experience the love of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Martin, R. P. (2003). [Messiah](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1111). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

### Small group questions:

1. What point did you connect to most in session 2? Why?
2. When have you seen God provide "at just the right time" in your life?
3. Which of God's names do you connect with the most? Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father, Abba, Emmanuel, etc.? Why?

**SESSION 3**

# SESSION 3:

**It is POSSIBLE to trust in difficult times...*when we believe that God is sufficient and sovereign***

*<sup>6</sup> So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?"*

*"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.*

*"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"*

*<sup>8</sup> "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.*

The test was straightforward and complex at the same time, "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you." God was direct in what he was asking, but his reason for asking seemed hidden from Abraham's view. How could God fulfill his promise through Abraham if there was no heir? Or maybe, why would God ask Abraham to do such a terrible thing? Afterall, child sacrifice was outlawed by the tribes of Israel.

The biblical prophets and the laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus expressly forbid this practice, but that also implies that it continued to occur. In fact, the story of Abraham's "sacrifice" of Isaac suggests that Abraham was familiar with human sacrifice and was not surprised by Yahweh's demand. However, the story also provides a model for the substitute of an animal for a human sacrifice that clearly draws a distinction between Israelite practice and that of other cultures.<sup>10</sup>

Practically speaking, if Abraham sacrificed his only son, how then could the future God had promised be possible:

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<sup>10</sup> Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament (electronic ed., Ge 22:1–2). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



*I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”*

Genesis 12:2-3

In short, God made a gut-wrenching request, that created an impossible scenario. But maybe that was the point. Maybe God wanted Abraham to know that he could trust God’s sufficiency and sovereignty, even when everything seemed hopeless and impossible. We are to believe from this narrative that Abraham knew nothing more and nothing less than God’s request.

The land of Moriah was a mountainous country in the region of future Jerusalem and was about a twenty-one-hour journey, or three days, in order to stop at night and rest. The term ‘Moriah’ can be translated “chosen by Jehovah”<sup>11</sup> or “the vision of Yahweh.” It is important to understand that God had chosen this place for his future vision, of the Messiah delivering his people, to unfold.

The Bible then says that “the next morning Abraham got up early.” The fact that Abraham rose early demonstrates that his intention was to be obedient even with the most difficult responsibility and burden he would ever shoulder. The Bible then says that Abraham, “saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about.” The order of events here is quite peculiar, “saddled ... took ... cut.” This sequence of Hebrew words implies that Abraham did one thing after another. So, it is surprising that he cut wood after saddling his donkey and gathering together his servants and Isaac. On a normal day it would have made more sense to cut the wood first, or better yet wake his servants and have them cut the wood and prepare for the journey? One can only assume that this illogical pattern of events was caused by the heavy burden he was carrying.

I imagined it probably happened something like this: As the sun was just peaking over the horizon, Abraham leans over and kisses the woman who birthed his son into this world and then forces himself from the warmth of his bed. There was no sleep to wipe from his eyes, just a tear-stained face to wash. A tear for each memory of him and his son he replayed in his mind throughout the night. And yet these tears also represented his commitment to fulfill his purpose before God.

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<sup>11</sup> Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures (p. 510). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

As he stepped outside his tent, the first thing he saw was his donkey. Rather than delegating, he immediately put himself to task in order to fill the time and allow Isaac to sleep a little longer. After he prepared his donkey for the three-day venture ahead, he woke two young men who worked for him. Now it was time to wake his only son. As he leaned his head into Isaac's sleeping quarters, he must have paused to watch his son sleep a few moments longer. After waking Isaac, Abraham began to split wood for the offering. This was a job that only he could do for God as God had commanded him to sacrifice his only son. After the preparation was completed, father, son and the two young men began the journey to Moriah. There is no dialogue mentioned between Isaac and his father on this long passage. Isaac most likely had no reservations about joining his father and there is nothing to suggest that this was anything but a trusting son willing to please dad.

Abraham teaches us not just to trust, but how to trust God particularly during the difficult moments of life. Sadly, we will all face moments that seem impossible to bear. Moments of hurt and disappointment, loss and disillusionment. There may even be seasons of life when the future is unimaginable. Times when the weight of our emotion are breaking the backs of our will and ability to journey onward. The question becomes, how do we trust God through the storms and seasons of difficulty. Maybe it is better stated, how do we trust God when everything seems impossible?

## How do we trust God when life seems impossible?

1. Trust begins with love...when we experience and understand the love of God, we can trust him with the impossible moments, circumstances, and seasons
2. Trust motivates faithfulness...being faithful means we are obedient in the moment, even when we don't see how God is working out the rest of the story
3. Trust enables holy optimism...a holy optimism means that I believe that God is at work in all circumstances to make us more like Jesus

Everything about that fateful day seemed to put Abraham's faith on trial. He had experienced God's love and now he would understand it through God's provision. He loved God enough to trust him, that trust motivated him to be faithful with the seemingly impossible task of sacrificing his beloved and only son, furthermore he believed that God was going to make it possible for his son to live.

The writer of Hebrews would point out an error in Abraham's thinking. He believed that even if he had to kill his son God would bring him back from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). Little did Abraham know that while he and Isaac walked together up the mountain, a ram was wandering his way up the other side. Abraham could only see his son, even as they reached the place that God had told him about...and even as he prepared his altar, arranged the wood, and put his son bound upon it. All the while, a male sheep was in route to be the substitute sacrifice, and he would get caught in a thorn bush at just the right time and in just the right place.

Abraham had told Isaac that God would provide a lamb to be sacrificed. He was right, God would provide a lamb, both then and two-thousand years later. "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) would be sacrificed on a different day and it would not be this son...

This son, Isaac, Abraham's son, was insufficient in that he was only human  
That Son, God's Son, Jesus, was the all-sufficient being who was 100% human and 100% God

This son's stripes could heal no one  
but that Son's stripes could heal everyone

This son was incapable of carrying the weight of the sins of the world  
that Son bore our griefs and our sorrows

This son could not look through the myriads of time to see every individual and even if he could,  
there would be nothing he could do about their state of depravity  
That Son looked down through the myriads of time and saw me as infinitely valuable and worth  
dying for

This son was on a mountain alone with just his dad  
but that Son died on a mountain in front of the whole world while the Father had to turn His back

This son needed that Son, but that Son needed no one...and Abraham could trust God with the  
impossible because of what that Son would one day do.

## Conclusion:

Is there a limit to our faithfulness? Abraham's faithfulness went beyond human understanding...beyond what was possible for mere mortals. It is not that he checked his mind at the door when he became a follower of God but rather in following God, he would trust Him beyond human understanding. Abraham realized that there were limits of what man could comprehend, and that when those limits are reached, we have only two choices. First, we can turn and walk away; or second, declare in that moment that we will trust Him all the more.

## Small group questions:

1. What point did you connect to most in session 3? Why?
2. Share an example of when you stayed faithful to God during a time that felt impossible. What did this faithfulness look like?
3. Why do you think it is important to trust God through storms and seasons of difficulty?

**SESSION 4**

# SESSION 4:

**It is POSSIBLE to tell a redemption-love-kind-of-story...when Jesus is the hero of  
your story**

<sup>15</sup> Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven. <sup>16</sup> “This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that <sup>17</sup> I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”

<sup>19</sup> Then they returned to the servants and traveled back to Beersheba, where Abraham continued to live.

C.S. Lewis once referred to this life as a cover and title page in comparison to eternity. James would word it this way:

*You’re nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, “If the Master wills it and we’re still alive, we’ll do this or that.”*

James 4:14-15 (The Message)

Author and educator Henrietta Mears called the brief moments that comprise the title page of our eternities: “the soul’s autobiography.”<sup>12</sup> In essence, God allows each of us to tell a story with our lives. And how we chose to spend each moment contributes to that narrative. Think about it this way: each task, event, and decision that takes place each day of our lives all contribute towards our story. When our story is finally told there can be but one central theme. I do not know about you, but I want to utilize my time so that redemption is the central theme of my life-story, and Jesus the Redeemer is the hero.

Abraham chose to tell a story with his life that believed all things are possible with God. And therein lies the beauty of redemption-love-kind-of-story. When the narrative of our lives has redemption as its theme and the Redeemer as the central character, then the entire story, every moment, bears the residue of the

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<sup>12</sup> The phrase ‘the soul’s autobiography’ appears in Henrietta Mears, *What The Bible Is All About*, (Ventura:Regal Books: 1983), 201.



miraculous. It is this kind of obedience to the faith that pleases the heart of God. It is also this kind of story that believes Paul's words in Ephesians 3:21-22:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The power at work in us, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26), is not limited by human ability or imagination. The power at work in us can do more than we could ever ask or conceive! Because of the power at work within us, we can believe: all that God wants to accomplish in my life is POSSIBLE! This is essentially what the angel of the Lord is communicating to Abraham.

Abraham believed that God would somehow save his son's life. And while that is true, what God had in mind was salvation for all mankind. You see, what God made possible concerning Isaac was only previews of coming attractions. Because of Abraham's obedience, God was going to make it possible for the whole world to be blessed. Abraham would choose to not waste his sufferings and tell a story with his life that ultimately had Jesus as the hero.

### [Commentary on Genesis 22:15-18](#)

The text is careful to note that God called to Abraham a second time—that is, after he had offered the ram as a sacrifice (v. 15). God's words here are the only divine oath directly recorded in Genesis. In the oath, God swears by himself, since there is no higher authority by which to take an oath (Heb. 6:13). The basis for God's oath is stated both at the beginning (because you have ... not withheld your only son, v. 16) and at the end (because you have obeyed my command, v. 18).

The oath itself promises three things. The first is that Abraham will be blessed with many offspring, repeating the comparison to the stars in the sky (v. 17; cf. 15:5), and adding for the first time a comparison to the sand on the seashore. Second, the promise shifts to a particular offspring of Abraham. Like the English word offspring, the Hebrew word (literally 'seed') can either be a collective referring to many or a particular referring to only one. To signal the shift to a particular offspring in Hebrew, the verb 'possess' is singular, as is the following pronoun in 'his enemies' (not 'their enemies' as in many English versions). This offspring of Abraham will take possession of the gates of his enemies. This promise is later expanded by Jesus, Abraham's great offspring. He spoke of the victory his church will have over the gates of Hades (Matt. 16:18). Finally, the last promise continues the focus on a particular offspring through whom all nations will consider themselves

blessed (v. 18). Thus, the last two of these three promises are specifically messianic in nature and find their fulfilment in Christ.<sup>13</sup>

This is the last time Abraham would be visited by an angel, which one can only imagine is perfectly ok since this message speaks of:

- The expansion of Abraham's family with his descendants being too many to count
- The growth and favor of God's people that would eventually become the Church of Jesus Christ
- The Redeemer who would one day be sacrificed in the land of Moriah so that "all the nations of the earth will be blessed"

Maybe we could summarize the angel's message this way, "Abraham, your story doesn't end with you, rather it ends at the feet of Jesus." A careful examination of Abraham's story and the angel's message helps us understand the three characteristics of a redemption-love-kind-of-story.

## The Characteristics of a Redemption-love-kind-of-story:

1. The story begins with a holy and heavenly calling (15)
2. The story is characterized by obedience that leads to opportunity (16-17)
3. The story focuses on God's wants for God's world (18)

Choosing a redemption-love-kind-of-story doesn't mean that we will pass every one of life's tests, nor does it mean that we are obedient all the time. Abraham, as we saw in an earlier session, made many mistakes and got his priorities out of order. Remember when a famine came to the land and Abraham took Sarah to Egypt to escape it. Before entering the land, Abraham conjured up a lie saying he was Sarah's brother instead of her husband so that he would not be killed (Genesis 12:10-13:4). Or when Sarah became impatient because she had not become pregnant, and advocated he have sex with her maidservant Hagar (Genesis 16).

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<sup>13</sup> Steinmann, A. E. (2019). Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary. (D. G. Firth, Ed.) (Vol. 1, pp. 221–222). London: Inter-Varsity Press.

Abraham made mistakes; at times in his life he made decisions that contradicted God's promises and principles. Nevertheless, obedience to God's wants for God's world would be Abraham's enduring narrative. His was a story that, in turn, helped other people discover and live a narrative of obedience. Abraham's mistakes NOT becoming the theme of his life reminded me of Thomas Cramner.

## Conclusion:

### Thomas Cramner and the Contradiction We Share

One of the most significant and influential historical figures in the Anglican Church is Thomas Cramner. His life echoes through the ages one revolutionary truth: it is not how one begins the race but rather it is how one crosses the finish line. Cramner attended Cambridge in the early 1500's where he was ordained as a priest. There he immersed himself in his studies and soon became an outstanding and well-respected theologian who was particularly fascinated with Luther, and committed himself to understanding the theological significance of the Reformation.

In August 1529, King Henry VIII and Thomas Cramner's paths happened to cross and both their lives were forever changed. King Henry found himself in a quagmire as he was trying to dissolve his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon so that he may marry Anne Boleyn. Henry appointed Cramner to write a treaty that allowed him to divorce Catherine and then selected him to act as one of his European ambassadors. When the Archbishop of Canterbury died, Cramner was immediately appointed the position by Henry.

His first act as archbishop was to declare the King's marriage to Catherine of Aragon as void. From this point on, Thomas Cramner's life was wrought with both compromise and success. While he would annul marriages for King Henry, he also fought for believers who had fallen out of grace with the King, and he also opposed the King when he wanted to take the country back towards Catholicism.

Eventually Henry died and King Edward took the throne for a short time ushering in a fresh wave of religious liberty. During his rule, Cramner wrote his most famous work, The Book of Common Prayer. Following Edward's reign, Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, took the throne. Mary was a staunch Catholic and sought to restore Catholicism to England. During her time in power, almost 300 protestant clergymen were burned at the stake while many more were imprisoned earning her the nickname "Bloody Mary."

Cramner was sent to Rome where he was tried and found a heretic and sentenced to join those who had gone before him at the stake. Before his death, Mary wished to achieve a moral victory over the Protestants by having Cramner recant. The former archbishop was placed in an Oxford cell and forced to watch as two of his closest friends, Latimer and Ridley, were put to death. Despondent and disillusioned, Cramner eventually signed the recantation saying, "I confess and believe in one, holy, catholic visible church, I recognize as its supreme head upon earth the bishop of Rome, pope and vicar of Christ, to whom all the faithful are bound and subject."

Before his death, he was taken to the Church of St. Mary where he would publicly retract thereby completing Mary's victory over what was left of the Protestant leaders. As he waited his turn to speak, one could only imagine that he pondered over his life and so many of the decisions he had made, as so much compromise and hypocrisy stained this life he had lived. Sure, he had some successes, but in such a moment as this, it is what one did wrong that weighs heavy on the soul.

It may have been while waiting his turn to speak or somewhere in the sleepless night before his execution that Thomas Cramner decided he would end his journey not by trying to save his life, but by trying to be committed to the One who saved his soul. So, when it was his time, he stood to a wooden podium and began to speak of his weakness and sins. Then his speech took an unusual and sharp turn as he declared this of his recantation:

They were written contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, to save my life if it might be.... And forasmuch as I have written many things contrary to what I believe in my heart, my hand shall first be punished; for if I may come to the fire, it shall first be burned...

He was immediately dragged outside the church where he was burned at the stake. As the fires began to grow beneath him, he kept the vow he had made just moments earlier and put his right hand in the flame stating, "This hand hath offended." He removed it but once to wipe his brow and immediately return it to the flames. With the last bit of breath in his lungs he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then he died.

What I love about Cramner's story is that he did not allow his past mistakes, significant as they were, to define him in the end. Though he had known moments of obedience and sinful circumstances of his own making...in the end he wished for his life's story to be all about Jesus. And so it is with each of our lives. The Lord, in his kindness, allows us to choose the story we tell. Though, at this point I hope it is obvious, there is only one kind of story that is truly worth telling. May the autobiography of your soul read: because of Jesus and the power at work in me, whatever God wants is possible in and through my life.

## Small group questions:

1. Recap: What are the characteristics of a redemption-love-kind-of-story?
2. How are you going to respond to what we've heard in these sessions, relating to the story of Abraham and Isaac?
3. Do you believe that God can use you for His purposes, despite your mistakes and failures?
4. Are you letting your past mistakes define who you are? Or are you letting Jesus define who you are?
5. What is holding you back from believing that God can do the impossible through you? Are you still holding on to your Isaac? If so, are you willing to let it go...right here...right now?

# LIFT TOUR Devotional

## “What’s POSSIBLE?”

Excerpt from Brent Crowe’s book: *Ten Steps to Your Best Life* (pp. 216-217)

Brent Crowe, PhD writes:

*Love is the only way to live. When we begin and end our day with an understanding of God’s love for us, it motivates how we love and interact with others. When we love others the way God loves us, it is possible to...*

- Create a rhythm of renewal and live in the beginning place of God’s goodness and grace.
- Give up on the gods who aren’t and spend more days chasing the light.
- Fill the storeroom of our lives to overflow with goodness through the words we speak.
- Enjoy rest in the journey so that we may journey well.
- Pursue healthy relationships built on love and honor.
- Calibrate the mentality of our hearts to have a Jesus tone to our daily living.
- Know every day we are more valuable to God than a galaxy.
- Be known as one who honors individual humans and all human life.
- Shine like stars in the world through our character and trustworthiness.
- Submit and delight in the desires of the good Father.

It is all possible because God is the keeper of all His promises. His love not only invites us into a life filled with His presence, but also shows us how to live there!