

## READ

---

Genesis 18

## REFLECT

---

There are two major, and dramatically different, encounters with the holy in Genesis 18. First Abraham met three messengers of God just outside his tent at the Oaks of Mamre. He offered them incredible hospitality – food, water, and time to rest in the shade. There’s also no indication Abraham knew the messengers to be anything but passersby, thus his hospitality was genuine. The kind of hospitality shown by Abraham was a cultural expectation for his culture – people took care of one another in a way we don’t today – and it’s setting up what happens when that hospitality isn’t offered in a later encounter. As the messengers were resting and waiting on their food, one told Abraham that he’d be back in a year and by then Sarah would have a son. This wasn’t big news – God, in the previous chapter, already said as much, but apparently Abraham hadn’t communicated that with Sarah, because she started cracking up when she heard she’d have a child. She and Abraham were simply too old for kids. Then God spoke directly, asking Abraham why Sarah would doubt what God is able to do. Sarah tried to lie, but of course God saw right through it. Her laughter gives us the second time someone laughs at God’s promise, reiterating why Isaac would be so named (his name means “he who laughs”).

The tone then shifts remarkably fast, as God turned the attention of everyone on Sodom and Gomorrah, where the three messengers are headed because of some great sin. God heard the “cries of injustice” and decided that it will not stand, so the cities would be destroyed. Abraham was shocked that this might happen, especially because his nephew, Lot, lived there, so he hoped to bargain with God. Beginning with the chance of 50 innocent people in the city, Abraham asks again and again if God will destroy it if fewer and fewer innocent lives are found, eventually settling on 10. All that was needed were 10 innocent, upstanding people in those huge cities and God promised to not destroy it. It seems incredibly fair, but we’re left with a cliff hanger – will God find those innocent lives?

## REACT

---

- How have you reacted to strangers showing up in your life? Do you bend over backward to make them feel at home, or do you even speak to them? Are you more willing to be hospitable in certain places, like the church, than you are at others, like your home?
- When you hear something that seems absurd in scripture, what's your reaction? Do you laugh like Sarah? Do you completely trust? Or are you somewhere in between? What would it take to have more trust, even in the seemingly impossible?
- How often have you been angry at injustice occurring somewhere in the world, whether it's gun violence on the streets of Chicago or the invasion of Ukraine? Have you prayed for God to intervene a certain way? Have you ever prayed for God to have compassion on a place, even though it seems bad and/or unjust? Why or why not?

## RESPOND

---

Practice hospitality: *Southern culture is supposed to be known for its hospitality, but it just isn't so anymore. In a world of extreme partisanship, we've lost what it means to offer kindness on the basis of shared humanity. Abraham met three strangers and offered them an abundance of love – food, water, shade, and rest. While we might not be confronted with strangers on our doorstep anytime soon, seek out someone you wouldn't ordinarily interact with and show some love. Maybe have packaged food and water ready in your car to hand to a homeless person, or invite an acquaintance into your home to get to know them better. Whatever you choose to do, go beyond your normal behavior to show love to those you might not ordinarily interact with.*