

# Trusting God's Providence: Saying No to Worldly Wisdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] What a blessing for a human being, a sinner, in the midst of a sinful world, to be able to sing and say with genuineness, it is well with my soul.

Oh, man. We are in Genesis, beloved. And today we come to a text very familiar to me. I've had the privilege of preaching this passage on a number of occasions over the last 20 years or so.

So, we come to it this morning and see on the heels of a wonderful success and blessing in Abram's life, a tremendous failure of spiritual leadership and faith.

And this is indicative of what it means to be a human being and live as a sinner before the Lord, saved by grace through faith in a broken world, surrounded by worldly wisdom, constantly trying to speak into our lives about how we're supposed to handle trouble, how we're supposed to handle things that aren't going our way, so that we're challenged to get on God's page, His design for our life in suffering and in trials.

The title of my message then for this morning, Trusting God's Providence, and the subtitle then, Saying No to Worldly Wisdom. We see all of this as a theme come out in the way that Abram and Sarai are approaching a particular challenging issue, circumstance, situation that is really weighing on their hearts and has been weighing on their hearts their entire married life.

[ 1 : 56 ] We find them at their late stage in life as older people, probably gray-headed, dealing with something that has plagued their hearts for decades.

And I think at this particular juncture, it's taking a toll on them, and they're showing and demonstrating human weakness. Human weakness.

I am so glad that the Bible doesn't leave stuff like this out. It's not just a glossing over of human weakness, suffering, and failure as we face troubles in life.

We don't just have all the stories about how people were heroic and submissive and wonderful in the sight of the Lord, and it reads like a story out of Disney or something.

There's not always a happy ending. People have to live with the consequences of their sin. And as we march through the next few chapters of Genesis, we're going to see that in spades.

[ 3 : 04 ] Right? So this is part of what it means to live in a fallen world as a person looking to the Lord, but living in the weakness of our humanity. And it causes us, like Job, to run to the Lord and repent and then trust in God's power working in us.

And He teaches us over the course of our life what it looks like for us to tap into, as it were, the Spirit's power at work in our life. What does it mean to walk with Jesus for us?

What does it mean to depend on Jesus Christ? What does it look like in my life when I'm making it about Jesus and not about me? This is what we're dealing with as we move through these scenarios these people are facing.

Now, I want to ask you several rhetorical questions before we come to read the passage that we'll be looking at this morning. We'll only do six verses. Let me ask you rhetorically.

So don't answer out loud. Just think. You can wear your answer on your face if you want to. That helps me. But don't answer out loud. All right? Do you believe that God is always in complete control of His creation?

[ 4 : 16 ] I didn't ask you, do you always believe? Here's what I'm asking. Do you believe that God is always in complete control of His creation?

Is there ever a time when God is not on top of things to include the details of your life? All right? Just think about that.

Be careful how you answer. Sometimes the way we answer isn't the way we live. Do you believe that God always does the right thing for your highest good no matter the circumstances? And do you also believe that God always does what is best for you at just the right time and in just the right ways?

Regardless of your circumstances. All of us are sitting here saying, I want so bad to say yes, but if I'm honest.

[ 5 : 24 ] Does my life always look like I always believe that and live by that? Well, if you're like Abram and you're like Sarai and you're human, the answer is no.

My life doesn't always look like I trust God, believe God, and know, know that God is always doing the right thing in my life even when it doesn't feel like it.

Because how many of you don't raise your hand because I don't want to know how many of you really like pain and suffering? All right.

Probably not any of us go for times when we just yeah, God bring how many of us? Yeah, Lord, bring on the suffering. Ratchet it up. Oh, yeah, that's it.

Oh, yes, yes. You pray like that. What we pray is God in the pain and in the suffering, help me be faithful. In the pain and in the suffering and the fear and the doubt when these things come, prepare me.

[ 6 : 29 ] Help my heart be ready. I want to walk faithfully with you. I don't want to make it about me. I don't want to do my plan. Been there, done that. This is the constant temptation that we face.

I'll tell you, Abram's just come off a really successful time in his life. He's done some wonderful things. We've seen God do some wonderful things through his life. And on the heels of this great spiritual success and him being commended by God, I count it to you as righteousness.

You are continuing to believe in me, Abram. He comes into this failure. And isn't that the way of it? And we kind of come off the mountain and crash into the valley and wonder, how did I get here? How did I get here? This is the story we're dealing with today. Romans 8, 28. Many of you who've been walking with the Lord for a bit of time, this becomes a favorite verse for many of us.

I'm going to put it up here on the screen for you so we can just save some time you turning there. And we know the New American Standard Version. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[ 7 : 48 ] Now, my question in this is, but do we really know God causes? This is where it hinges.

He doesn't simply allow. Well, I guess God allowed this. He causes all things in our lives to work to His good purposes.

Do we believe this? And do we live on this promise? The good that God is doing in your life in these times as He squeezes you and you see what comes out is the good of getting you to the point, like Job, where you're repenting.

You're repenting of what is coming out that isn't in line with making it about Jesus. How else is God going to show you the deceived nature of your heart except to put you in the pot, boil it some, and see what boils out.

And you get to see it. You get to hear it. And as that happens, you step back and say, Whoa, where did that come from? It came from your heart, beloved. And now you know what to repent of.

[ 8 : 52 ] You know what to confess. You know what to seek God on. You already had some ideas about it. But now God's making it very clear for you.

God causes. If we took that verse and we broke it down and we know, do we? What do we know? That God causes. How many things?

All. All things. To do what? What does He cause them to do in our lives? He causes all of that to work together in a way that only God can for good.

And what good is that? The good of conforming you to be like Jesus. In all that you think, say, and do. That's the good. Good doesn't mean that He showers you with all the material blessings you want.

Good means that He is spiritually conforming you to the image of His Son. He's helping you take on and express more and more of His character in your life.

[ 9 : 53 ] So you get to show what you know. And what do you know? I know that God causes all things to work together for good as He conforms me to the life of His Son.

Especially in my suffering and in my trials. That's what we believe. Well, we believe it until the trouble comes. We believe it until the suffering gets ratcheted up enough.

We believe it until the pain just nags at us so much that we're beaten down. We believe it until the heartache is gripping us so much that we don't feel like we can breathe.

We believe it until our sense of loss and loneliness slams us like a freight train. That's when that belief is really tested.

We can begin to lose our grip on this. And we know that God causes all things.

[10:52] Even this that I'm going through now to work together for good to those who love Him. So maybe in times like this, Romans 8.28 would read more accurately of our lives if it said this.

And we need to try to remember and try to rehearse to ourselves that God causes all things. But it doesn't say that, does it? That's not what the verse says.

The verse says that we know. We know. Knowing is so important to our walk with the Lord, especially in times of the unknown.

Now, did you hear that? Knowing what God has revealed and what we can know is so important in times when there is the unknown staring us in the face.

And it is exacerbated by some sense of suffering, pain, loss. That uncertainty then can be compounded through those emotional experiences in our life.

[11:57] The Bible speaks to this. It doesn't dismiss it. It doesn't psychologize it. It speaks to it very openly, plainly, in a raw way.

Because it's part of being human. We're going to see this in the example today in these two people's lives. You and I are at a place where we need to learn in our walk with the Lord what it means to know what God has revealed to us and live in what God has made known.

Don't run to the unknown. That's a place that God has left blank. That's for Him to write in. Run to the known.

What is God written? What is God said? What is God promised? What examples do I have? What principles can I adopt? That's where I need to stand.

And God will take care of the unknown. In His time, He'll write it in. And I'll be able to experience it. And then I'll look back and say, Oh, that's what that was about. Isn't that what happened to Job?

[13:02] He didn't know that God designed all this great suffering in His life to show Satan, You don't have the power to unsave my people. Saving faith will hold in the life of my people.

And it held in Job's life. And at the end, this is what God showed Satan. Do you know Job died never knowing that that's why all that happened to him? God never revealed that to him.

What was Job called to do? Not try to write into the blank spaces and dark spaces that only God can do. He was supposed to live in faithfulness to God with what God had said.

It didn't help that he had three friends talking worldly wisdom into his life. But God took care of all that as well. We need to learn to wait and to trust.

So I want to help you. I want to help you. I want to build you up in your believing and experiencing God's goodness to you. I want to help you.

[14:06] If you're not currently in a time of uncertainty, a time of hurt, of suffering, of fighting doubts, fighting fears, fighting anxieties, if that's not currently your situation, just wait.

It's coming. God designs and uses these trials in our lives, again, to squeeze out so that we can see what's in. We can repent and God can purify.

He can do the work of refining. And we can begin to be more like his son. Now let's read the text together with all of that in mind.

Chapter 16, verse 1. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children in all these years. And she had, notice, an Egyptian maid.

So Hagar is from Egypt. And so she is a slave or servant in the house of Abram. And she is specifically assigned to attend to Abram's wife, Sarai.

[15:12] So Sarai said to Abram in verse 2, Now behold, in other words, now look at the reality. Take in the reality. The Lord.

Do you notice what she says here? The Lord has prevented me. So it's not like she doesn't realize what's going on. This is God causes all things, folks.

The Lord has prevented me from bearing children. So what does she do? She hatches a plan.

Abram, my husband, please go into my maid.

You understand that. Have relations with my maid. Perhaps I will obtain children through her. So it's not a long shot, but it's not a guarantee.

And so she is betting on the card that says, I bet because she's so young and she's fertile, she'll probably get pregnant. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

[16:10] After Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, the Egyptian.

Again, do you notice who's doing what here? Abram's wife took Hagar to her husband and said, here she is.

Man. She gave her, Hagar, to her husband Abram as his wife. So this woman isn't a mistress. She's not a concubine. She's not out of what we would call wedlock with Abram in this exchange of intimacy between the two of them. No.

Here, take a wife. And in this time and in this day, unfortunately, polygamy was a thing. That was introduced way back to us early in Genesis. This is sin.

[17:09] It wasn't God's design for these people to do this. Yet, here we go. So what happened in verse 4? Abram responds. He went in to Hagar.

We understand that. And what happened? Well, she got pregnant. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress, Sarai, was despised in her sight.

And Sarai said to Abram, May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms. But when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight.

May the Lord judge between you and me. But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your maid is in your power. Do to her what is good in your sight.

So Sarai treated Hagar harshly. And so Hagar, in response, fled from her presence. That means fled from her household.

[18:12] Ran away. Isn't this a sweet story? Wow. It's in the Bible, isn't it?

So this isn't a myth. This isn't some Disney narrative with a happy ending. This is raw and real. And this is what we do. This is what happens to us.

This is, I'm going to put it up here on the screen for you, this is an attack on the sufficiency of God's Word. Because this has nothing to do with remaining faithful to what God has already promised, spoken, and committed to.

Through that really weird covenant that He did with the smoking stuff and all, walk between the animal halves and all. God has made it really clear. I gave you my Word. I'm going to follow through. This is an attack on the sufficiency of God's promise, His Word.

This is what we have to live with. You want to ask the question, and I do, where's Romans 8, 28, and all this human drama and messiness. Now, I want to tell you something about this.

[19:18] This is the beginning of what will be the moment when these two people step back and say, how did we get here? I've done that.

How did I get here? This is the beginning of that moment coming when they're going to ask that. Thank God, God is sovereign.

For now, their plan seems like an expedient answer. Ten years have passed since God promised Abram a son.

Now, Abram is 85 years old. Sarai is 75. She's barren. She's been barren her entire life. She understands this is a barrenness of womb that is wrought by God's own hand.

God's doing this to me, she says. That's what she points out in verse 2. Now, in this culture, it is shameful, shameful for a woman to be barren because the people looked on barrenness as a curse from God.

[20:25] There's something about you and your life that God has done this to you. It was like leprosy. Leprosy was a sign of God punishing you for something in your life, something about you.

So, this is a personal shame that Sarai has been wearing as the mistress of the house. She's the lady. Of all the ladies that are involved in Abram's life, Sarai is at the top of the food chain and all of that.

But she has this terrible, shameful thing she has to bear in it all. So, her heart here, ladies, her heart is broken. Her heart is anxious.

She's grown weary and impatient under that kind of thing. Wearing that. It's something that God has used in her life to keep her dependent on the Lord.

And for whatever reasons, at this particular juncture of life, probably because she understands that God has told Abram, I'm going to bring you an heir. And Sarai has grown impatient in the years since that promise.

[ 21 : 31 ] When's that going to happen? I'm just getting older, Abram. I think maybe you misheard. Something's going on. And so, she's thinking, I've got to figure out a way. Does that resonate with you? I've got to make something happen.

I don't know what waiting on the Lord should look like at this point kind of thing. So, what does she do? She reasons within her own heart. Uh-oh. She reasons within her own heart a way to have a son.

And it's a way which she wrongly assumes is what God wants her to do. That's when it gets really dangerous. It's one thing for us to know that we're hatching a plan that we don't want to deal with God about, so we kind of push God out to the back.

Because we know if we come to the Lord and we genuinely, humbly bring this to Him, He's going to slap it down and say, absolutely not. What were you thinking? That kind of thing, right? God doesn't talk like that, but you understand what I'm saying.

Instead, when we become convinced that our plan is a plan that God would, God's going to be good with this after all. Look at the pain and the suffering I'm going through. He doesn't want that.

[ 22 : 41 ] And now we stamp it with God's approval. Ugh. That's what's happening here. So, here's the problem with what she's reasoning in her heart about God wanting her to do.

Sarai's idea reflects a heart embracing the wisdom of the world, not the wisdom of God. She's taken the worldly way out. Well, what's the wisdom of the world since that's a key theme to this passage, Jeff?

The wisdom of the world is how ungodly, unbelieving society thinks about and resolves the everyday issues of life.

Instead of following Jesus in faith, worldly wisdom tempts us to doubt and then dump the truth in order to do what is right in our own eyes.

Why? Why all this? Because worldly wisdom discourages our hearts in knowing that God causes all things to work together for good.

[ 23 : 44 ] I've heard most of them because I've studied psychology and counseling a good bit of my adult life and the degrees and everything. I remember early on in my days hearing things from the psychological community that I was studying under that you could Christianize psychology and take the best wisdom of man and the best wisdom of God and blend them together and have the best hybrid.

And I finally came to the place in my growth in the Lord and got around people who helped me understand and discern that logic, as it were, that how in the world can two things be best?

That's not the definition of best, is it? Something that's best stands alone. Doesn't it? So how can I take the best of man's wisdom and the best of God's wisdom and blend them together and come up with a better best?

You tracking? You don't. It's oil and water. Worldly wisdom or man's wisdom cannot trump, top, contribute to, assist.

That's like saying when God gave us His Word for the cure of souls and God gave us Jesus, to give us new souls. He gyped us and didn't give us enough so that worldly wisdom, man's wisdom, has to come along and help shore up what God left out.

[ 25 : 08 ] How dare us? What pride? Well, I studied that and lived under that for quite some time. And what did I have to do? Come before the Lord and repent and say, Lord, I'm not going to come before Your people and try to mix oil and water and tell them and tell them that we get to a certain point in our life and we can no longer look to and trust Your Word to help us with the issues of life.

You left some stuff out. And so we're going to run over here to psychology and we're going to tap into a lot of the wisdom that unbelieving people who hated you came up with and we're going to mix that in.

Do you hear this? And you say, Jeff, how did you ever fall for that? Well, you're undiscerning. You're young in the faith. You're trying to figure it out.

Look, worldly wisdom doesn't sneak up and say, I'm about to tell you something that's from hell. It sneaks up and it whispers to you and it tells you things that sound like it's going to help you get out of your mess, relieve your suffering, deal with the loneliness, fear, doubt, anxiety.

And there are shades enough of it that you listen. I did. I sat there and listened to them teach me all this stuff and I imagined myself sitting in a counseling room with a counselee and saying these things and dealing with these things and I thought, okay, I think I could probably make that work.

[ 26 : 36 ] Then I got out and started doing it and realized that this is, all I'm doing is putting band-aids on stuff. I'm just teaching people to cope. I'm not giving them any hope at all. And I repented.

I repented. Now look, I want to show you something about this. As I speak about worldly wisdom and as you see that, worldly wisdom discourages our hearts in knowing that God causes all things to work together for good.

You may have a counselee sit in front of you or a friend or a family member sit in front of you and say, I don't see God in this. I don't feel God in this.

He's distant. I don't know where He is. And they weep and their heart hurts. Is it enough to just say God causes all things?

We come alongside of them. We cry with them and we bear the burden of the pain that they feel and we walk with them in the Lord. Now let me give you some more insight on this before I turn to this first point.

[ 27 : 44 ] Now look, just stay with me on this please. Worldly wisdom sounds and seems comfortable and practical. But at its core, it never makes your life about Jesus.

That's the problem. It's not that worldly wisdom never has anything of value to say or helpful. I remember there were things they said and I go, well, that could be helpful. I don't think that's going to be the answer.

But I remember the first time I ever heard that. the psychologist that was teaching the class, Intro to Psychology, told us he was a therapist, professional therapist.

And I remember him telling us the story of two, a husband and a wife, and the wife was hurt and complaining about the fact that her husband never ever offered her any encouragement, any praise, never built her up in any way.

He was critical, blah, blah, blah. And so I remember him saying, you know, I took a clock and I told him, I'm going to take this clock and I wound it up. I wanted a clock that would tick, tick, tick, tick, tick.

[ 28 : 46 ] And I wanted a clock that had the things, the clackers, like that, he said. And I gave it to him and I said, I want you to set this for every hour. And every hour, when that clock goes off somewhere in the house, you're going to hear it and that's going to be your cue to go find your wife and say something praiseworthy to her.

And that was his answer to their dilemma. Now, what did he not deal with? He told us that my brother is pointing right here to the heart. What's the root?

Why was he doing that in the first place? Yeah, you can teach a dog how to change its behavior, but what do we do about the root? Where's that coming? Where's that critical spirit coming from? Where's that lack of love, kindness, patience, considering others more important than yourselves? The words of Jesus himself. Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. What does it look like for me to follow Jesus and deal with my wife in those times?

Even as I was a brand new baby Christian and even sitting in that room in that moment, I'm sitting there with my pen. I'm not writing anything anymore and I'm thinking to myself, that's a pretty cool idea.

[ 29 : 55 ] Okay. It never occurred to me. We're just putting a band-aid on a problem. Now, I'm going to fast forward. He made a comment at that point when he was talking about people who had insomnia and he suggested to them that they read the Bible.

It was so boring it would put them to sleep. And that went through me as a new... You can imagine my zeal as a new Christian. I'd just been saved. And that went through me like a hot knife through butter. I met with him after the class.

I asked him if I could talk to him. We went into his office. We sat down and I said, Sir, with all respect, I just wanted to ask you if you wouldn't make references to the Bible that are derogatory. I think I understand why you said it. Maybe you were just joking but that kind of cut me. He went off his nut. That man lit into me. He about had me in tears before I left his office.

That was one of my first encounters with trying to stand up for the Lord and having somebody in a position of authority. And so, the next class period, he opened the Bible and he turned to a passage where Jesus said, Be ye perfect as I am perfect.

[ 31 : 02 ] And he looked right at me and did like this and he said, Let's ask our resident biblical scholar to interpret that verse for us. And I just sat there as a new Christian. I had no idea what that

verse meant.

I know I was as red as a beet. This is the world. Don't think the world is going to pat you on the back for trying to follow the Lord. No matter how respectful and gracious and kind you are, the world hates God and hates God's truth.

You know why? Because it tells them that there is a God in heaven who is the authority. He is the authority. And people don't like that.

So they run from it. Worldly wisdom sounds and seems comfortable and practical, but at its core, it never makes your life about Jesus.

So you've got to ask yourself, Do I want to be comfortable and practical? Do I want to follow the Lord in times of suffering? Now, at best, at best, worldly wisdom makes your life about Jesus plus.

[ 32 : 09 ] Many of you have heard me talk about this before. It has nothing to do with self-denial. Here's what Jesus plus is, is what I've been describing. There's going to be some Jesus in my life, but it's going to be Jesus added on to a lot of what I think I want.

A lot of what I think needs to happen with me. And so when it's convenient and when it's practical, when I think it might be helpful, we'll bring Jesus in.

It's Jesus plus. You see what I'm saying? And this is a challenge for each of us. At best, that's what it is.

Here's what it is at worst. At worst, it takes the wisdom, truth, and treasure that Jesus Himself is and replaces Him with the deceptive counterfeits of self and Satan.

Now that's a loaded statement, friends, but it's true. Worldly wisdom takes the wisdom, truth, and treasure of who Jesus is.

[ 33 : 12 ] Paul said He's our treasure. He's our wisdom. And replaces Jesus with the deceptive counterfeits of self and Satan. Now that's a very dangerous place.

Jeff, why are you preaching so straight about this? Because I'm concerned for you. I don't want you to get dragged into this deceptive mess. I know what it does.

I deal with this all day long most of my days in my life as a pastor. I see the destructive nature of this. I've lived it. I've studied it again for most of my adult life and I've had to think through this stuff. I'm not saying that I've got all the answers, but I'm saying God does. In this paradigm where you're replacing Jesus with self and Satan in terms of this wisdom you're following, in that paradigm, Jesus will always be compromised and made convenient.

You with me? You will always compromise the Lord and He will always be made to bow to the plan. Because that's what you've decided in your heart you want to follow.

[ 34 : 22 ] Now here's how this plays out in the scene between Abram and Sarai. I want to give you three ways Satan uses worldly wisdom to draw your heart away from standing firm in your faith.

Faith in God's truth. Faith in God's goodness. Faith in God Himself. Faith in God in providing for you as His follower. Remember we're coming off of several points where I told you when we're facing trials and suffering and challenges in our life like Abram and Sarai are Eleazar will be the heir and God says no, no, no Abram that is not the plan.

Son, did I tell you that? I didn't tell you that was the plan. Eleazar will not be your heir is going to come from your body. And so I went through some things that say follow this this is how you follow God in faith when those things are coming at you like that.

Now we get to chapter 16 and we see them fail. Fail to apply those things. Now how do we discern? How do we understand and interpret what's happening with them?

How do we unpack that? The first thing we're going to deal with is the wisdom of the worlds because the wisdom of the world deceives our hearts. The wisdom of the world deceives.

[ 35 : 43 ] That's what it's about. Now we could ask the question right up at the front. Jeff, are we talking about self-deception or satanic deception here? What's the answer?

Yes, both. Both. Because we see both here in our text. Look again with me at verses 1 and 2 and rehearse what we're dealing with. Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

That introduces what she's going to think is the solution. And so, verse 2. So Sarai said to her husband Abram, Behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.

And so, this could read this way. So I've come up with a plan. Please go in to my maid. That is, go and have relations with her. Perhaps I will obtain children through her.

And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. I mean, right off the bat, you think, alright, this is not a good plan. Adultery? Are you kidding me? And then you're going to get a woman pregnant through your husband and you're going to take her baby away from her and claim it as your own?

[ 36 : 52 ] This is... Do you hear this dripping with consequences? It's like, dude, right... This is like taking gas and pouring it in your tent and then throwing a match in.

This is going to burn the place to the ground. And it does. And if it wasn't for the Lord, it has stayed that way. The plain fact is this.

Sarai borrowed this idea from the world. She borrowed this idea from the culture. How often are we tempted to do that? She joins what Abram has told her that God said about giving him an heir from his own body with what she can reason from the way the world handles this issue.

And she has an answer taken from man and God. Jesus plus. Not good. Okay, fine. God said the heir is going to come from your body.

He didn't say mine. So how can we get you involved in this thing and solve the problem of giving me a kid? You an heir. Take away my shame.

[ 37 : 56 ] Provide you with someone who's going to inherit everything and make God happy. I got it. And that's what they did. That's the plan they went with.

Their eyes squarely fixed on the problem. Not the provider. They conclude that having a baby at their age and in Sarai's condition is impossible.

But they can look to the world and Sarai mistakenly assumes that she's been given a workable fix to her problem.

Workable fix. We call that pragmatism. Pragmatism. The doctrine of pragmatism. The ideology of pragmatism is this. If it works, do it.

All we care about is if it works. So Sarai succumbs to the tempter who hatched this plan to turn her and her husband's hope away from God, away from his promises.

[ 38 : 58 ] God promised Abram, I'm going to give you an heir in my own time. I'm going to give you an heir in my own way. And that heir is going to come from your body, Abram. Wait and be patient.

And he was doing that up to this point. The law of the land and the culture in which Abram and Sarai and Hagar live allows for this kind of provision for children.

It does. The world came up with a way for barren people to get this fixed. Here is Satan's snare. This is the idea of the world and here is what it breeds.

Look. Satan's snare. Adopting the world's wisdom requires compromising God's truth. Worldly wisdom and godly wisdom are incompatible.

Incompatible. And that's why we need to be very, very careful about this. You will not hear me say that people in the world can't offer good advice. They can't offer good counsel.

[ 39 : 59 ] They can't say things that can be helpful. We have people all over the world that are doing counseling on a professional basis. We have other people that are family members and friends sitting down with each other and trying to work through problems and they're not believers.

And they're saying some helpful things. But what are they not saying? They're not saying make it about Jesus. And here's how you do that.

That's what they're not saying. That's the issue. That's something that is dear to my heart.

Adopting the world's wisdom requires compromising God's truth. Worldly wisdom and godly wisdom are incompatible. So society's stamp of what is legal does not automatically and safely make something right for Christians to do.

Right? In the sight of the Lord. You can think of examples of that. What are some things in our culture and our nation that are legal but are not stamps of approval for Christian thinking and behavior and living?

[ 41 : 12 ] The first one that came to my mind was abortion. Right? That's not okay with the Lord. We don't counsel women to abort their babies. What about other areas of our lives?

Anything that requires us to compromise. How about no-fault divorce? Man, the first time I think I heard that I was a grown-up.

No-fault divorce. And my head just went... I just didn't know how in the world to reconcile that. How about same-sex marriage? Those are just a few examples of legal things but not Jesus-pleasing things.

They don't belong in the life of a Christian. Now, anytime... Anytime we are tempted... Look at the screen there. Anytime we are tempted to run a course which requires us to compromise any aspect

of God's wisdom and truth for living, we are headed in the wrong direction.

We're not making it about Jesus. Abram and Sarai are in a position right now where they are compromising God's design for a one-woman, one-man marriage.

[ 42 : 26 ] That's God's design. And just because the Old Testament says that some of these people did it doesn't make it right. Polygamy is not God's design. And so what they're doing is they're adopting the unbelieving culture's way of dealing with Sarai being barren.

Sarai was driven by shame and fear at this point. She wants to be... Listen, she wants to be fulfilled. Who doesn't?

Is there a person on the planet that doesn't want to have a sense of fulfillment in their life? I don't know of any yet. She wants to know that fulfillment as a mom.

She wants that shame to be lifted off of her. I can imagine her walking around in her daily life and every once in a while maybe walking by where people were talking and now they hush.

You get that feeling? Or she looks across the field and she sees some people whispering and giggling and pointing, you know. She's an object of derision. And she wants that lifted.

[ 43 : 30 ] I understand that. Without the aid of biblical truth to help you and I discern right from wrong, we will reason and we will assess things from a self-favoring point of view.

This is a lot of what biblical counseling takes into consideration when I sit down to counsel people. from scripture. It's this inherent default tendency to self-favor.

You hear it in you. You hear it in the people. You get in a discussion. You want to have a rational discussion and you find yourself drifting or you find the other person drifting into phrases and stuff now that describe more of a self-favoring posture.

You hear them trying trying to rescue themselves a little bit. Yes, that's true. That is true. I did say that and I did say it with a tone. However, right?

But, can we just be honest? Can we take into consideration your contribution to the issue?

[ 44 : 41 ] I can't do the head like, I can't do it. But we get all this attitude about it. This is what we're talking about going on in their life right now.

We will self-favor apart from the truth of the Lord. And that always, always, always makes us vulnerable to worldly wisdom.

The more we give in to that self-deception and that self-favoring as we factor out the wisdom of God, the more vulnerable we become to that worldly wisdom because the world tells us what we want to hear.

Amen? You, listen, hatch a plan. Get an idea. Don't worry about whether it lines up with the Bible or not.

Don't worry about if it pleases the Lord or not. Don't do that. Just go out there and start surveying. It won't be long before you will find someone to tell you that's a great plan.

[ 45 : 44 ] You take care of you. You go, girl. You go, girl. You go, dude. You will find that person. I promise you. That's not what we're after.

That is not what we're looking for. Friends, listen. As soon as we begin to turn our eyes to the world's wisdom and the things of life, we open ourselves to deceit.

We start a progression which takes us away from single-minded devotion to God and toward empty deception and compromise. that is the path. But in the moment, in the moment, it works, works.

Pragmatism. And then it becomes comfortable. And now we're in really dangerous territory. When not making it about Jesus becomes comfortable, that should be a huge warning sign to you.

It should terrify you to get to that moment. I'm at peace with the plan that I've hatched even though it has nothing to do with the Lord. Oh! And I'm a Christian?

[ 46 : 51 ] Now, I hope you're not sitting there going, I think Jeff's describing something that doesn't happen in people's lives as Christians. It can't be that like that, can it?

Well, that is the question. Are you a Christian? Are you turning to the Lord? For Abram's part, look how verse 2 ends.

And Abram listened to the voice of his wife. I don't want to throw Sarai under the bus here. We're going to see in just a second Abram's deal in this.

In this case, listening to the voice of his wife was bad. Now, I'm going to tell you why, ladies. Guys, please listen here and look at Pastor Jeff. Listen. It is not always wrong, guys, husbands, to listen to the voice of your wife.

This is not a blanket statement of any time your wife tries to open her mouth and give you, get that thing and boom! Whom! But in this case, it's not good.

[ 48 : 01 ] And Abram should have picked up on it. Just like Adam. Here, Adam, you eat. You know what, Eve? I'm going to pass because God said, don't.

Give me that. What were you thinking? Um, um, um, um, um. We need to stamp out bad theology, Jesus plus, worldly wisdom.

See it for what it is. It's not going to take you down the road you want to be. Why? Why is it bad?

This was an ungodly plan from the beginning and it led them into sin.

It reminds us of Genesis 3. God pronounces a series of curses on the situation because Adam listened to the voice of his wife. And he shouldn't have done that.

Now here, guys, I want to carefully unpack this with you in the next few minutes because I want you to understand what's wrong about this because again, it's not always wrong. You want to thank God that we married over our heads and that we have wives who speak godly wisdom into our life that are tender, that are compassionate, that have our back as our wife.

[ 49 : 15 ] Yeah, maybe sometimes they're like us and they don't always say it in the best way and in the right timing, but our wives as they walk with the Lord are trying to speak the Lord's wisdom into our life and tenderly help us.

In this case, he's listening to the voice of his wife and she is proposing a really bad plan. So how do we understand this?

Alright, guys, here it is. Watch this now as it comes up. What we're seeing in Abram's life in this moment is abdication. Alright, let's use that big word. Abdication. What does that mean?

Abandoning.

Abandoning. Of Abram's God-ordained role as the spiritual leader, spiritual head, spiritual authority in his wife's life, in his family's life. He is cowardly out.

This is not good. It's just the same as I've mentioned with Adam's abdication. We have Adam doing an abandoning of his role.

[ 50 : 14 ] Now we have Abram's sin and his lack of godly leadership. And that lack of godly leadership had a tremendous negative impact on his marriage.

and we're going to see as we go, it has a tremendous negative consequence for millions and millions and millions of other people that are going on to this day. To this day.

So friends, this can be a bad scene when we choose things like this. So it's abdication and I'm going to give you now, you see that word lack capitalized there?

I'm going to give you a little helpful acronym about this lack of spiritual leadership being provided by husbands in the lives of their wives and family.

What does that look like? Well, let's characterize it in what we see in Abram here. Look what happens. Abram, first of all, L, L-A-C-K, lack, he listened without question.

[ 51 : 12 ] We don't have anything in the text to suggest that Abram had a hitch in his spirit. We don't see him going, say what now, run that by me again. That's what I thought you said.

Hmm. We don't have that. Well, what does the text say? So she comes to Abram, behold, the Lord's prevented me, go into my maid. What is the next, how does it end?

And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. Poop, period. Okay. This is a sounds good to me. He exercised no discernment in what he heard from his wife.

I think Abram had grown weary. There's probably a part of Abram where his heart has been breaking for his wife for decades.

He loves her. We've seen him do some crazy things in relationship to her, but I don't doubt his love for her. And I think what's going on is he's got this mixture of I want to help alleviate her pain and her heartache and her shame, while at the same time, I don't know this is going to be the best thing, but let's go with it and see how it turns out.

[ 52 : 30 ] And I'm thinking, dude, alright, what else happened? He abdicated without qualm. I know we don't throw the word qualm around a lot.

Qualm means an uneasy feeling, a pain of conscience. He didn't seem to have that.

He didn't seem to have an apprehensiveness, an uneasiness, a misgiving. Again, a hitch in his spirit that says, you know, on the front of it, Sarai, hun, that sounds workable.

I get it. I know, down the road, I know, you're going to bring him up and they did this and she got a baby and all. I know, I know. But that doesn't seem to jive with what God has said.

It seems like we're mixing what God has promised with something that we're now taking hold of and running with. Wow. Can we pray about it?

[ 53 : 28 ] That's not happening. Okay. Okie dokie. We'll do your plan. He abdicated.

Abram failed in his responsibility, gentlemen, to lead with godly wisdom and reassurance. That takes us into this next one.

C. He conceded without qualification. No, but here's what we'll do instead. I am not, you know, this was all me just trying to be over the top here with this thing.

The visuals, sometimes they help. You don't come down. That's not what I'm advocating. That's not what the Lord, but what would this look like? Sarai, hon, listen.

Sit down with me. Grab her hands. Your eyes maybe feel, you know what? Hon, I know you have suffered. I have seen it. I've heard you crying.

[ 54 : 28 ] I know this is so hard for you. I know it's heavy. Hon, I'm here. I'm here. Maybe you get up then, you go over and you grab her and you hold her and you just weep with her.

I know that this is hard. But, hon, listen, that's not a good plan. Here's why. Here's why. I think that's only going to compound the issue.

I can see all kinds of reasons this is not going to be the helpful thing. And then you do this, gentlemen. Can I remind you what the Lord said? Let's just rehearse together what God has said. Let's take comfort in what God's told us and promised us. He said that the air would come from my body and we just need to wait on His timing. I know, I know, I know. We're old and it doesn't seem like it can happen.

But do you believe that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him? You see what He's doing? He's tenderly walking with His wife.

[ 55 : 27 ] He's coming alongside of His wife. He's taking into consideration that right now in this moment she's showing weakness. weakness. Just like He has in the past.

And so He comes alongside. No, hon, we won't do that, but we will do this. Boy, how differently this would read if that's what we were dealing with.

It's not wrong to point out to your wife that something's going on in her life that is either sinful or is moving her toward something that will be sinful.

That's love. But the way you go about it needs to follow Ephesians 4. It needs to be a time when you can give grace to the hearer according to the need of the moment.

And so you're considering your wife and her receptivity. You don't chicken out to do it, but you choose your time. You have your moment. You're ready.

[ 56 : 33 ] You've prepared her. You say, Jeff, I'm a busy man. That's a lot of work. I don't want to hear that. Don't come whining that to me or Greg because we're going to be rebuking you and say, you do it anyway.

You do it anyway. K, knowingly remained aloof without quelling. Here's another Q word we don't often use, quell, but it worked well with the alliteration.

Sorry. Quell means to suppress, to put an end to, to extinguish, to quiet, to calm, to alleviate. He knowingly remained aloof from the situation instead of quelling it, calming it, quieting it, alleviating the issue.

He needs to understand the issue is not that his wife doesn't have a child. Did you hear me? Say, Jeff, wait a minute. That is what the, no, no, no.

No, no, no. You're smiling. You know. She knows. She's going to get a kid. Is that going to fix it?

[ 57 : 42 ] No, it's just going to make it worse. What's the problem? The problem is her. It's her heart, not her barrenness.

She's not making it as we would say about Jesus. And Abram should have saw that. This is a plan that doesn't make it about God. We're going to do a different plan.

That's love. And you need to speak that truth in love. Speak the truth in love. and make it about the Lord.

He took a woman, leave me out of this attitude. He didn't make any attempt to right his wrong in any of it.

The larger question at this point in the text is this. Did this sin nullify God's promise? Did it ruin the covenant that the Lord had made with Abram?

[ 58 : 45 ] Can we have that kind of power? To undo the promises of God in our life. We can suffer the consequences of our sin. Absolutely. But can we undo God's favor on our life?

Nope. And we're going to see that doesn't happen. Will this sin thwart God's plan to bless Abram and provide an heir for him and his wife in the way that God promised?

No. It's not. It's going to complicate a lot of things in their life but this is not a threat to God. Did Satan's sin and selfishness win out?

No. In the moment but not over all and not over God's plan or God's love or God's design. This is great comfort. You mean I cannot send my way out of God's favor?

No, you can't. But you can certainly sin your way into a wasted life. You can make bad decisions, sinful decisions, selfish decisions, Jesus plus decisions that complicate your life and the life of the people around you and spread a lot of hurt.

[ 59 : 57 ] And that's about what's going to happen now. A lot of people are going to suffer because of this. Abram and Sarai like Adam and Eve have taken the bait and now Satan sets the hook.

work. Ungodly thinking leads to ungodly actions unless truth intervenes. Unless truth intervenes. The world's wisdom defiles our relationships.

Verses 3 and 4. After Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian and followed through on her plan. She gave Hagar to her husband Abram to be his wife.

And so they did what they did. They went into each other. Hagar got pregnant and when Hagar saw that she was going to have a baby in comparison to or contrast to her mistress being barren, she took a superior position in her own heart over Sarai.

Look at me. Look who's the big wig now. And this caused all kinds of problems. The word despised here in the NAS, her mistress Sarai was despised in Hagar's sight means disdained, slighted, held contempt toward.

[ 61 : 14 ] See, this is one of the first items of fallout. Right? Before the baby even comes, we've got these two women now locking horns with Abram right in the middle where he does not want to be.

And you look at Abram, gentlemen, and you say, yeah, and you know what, bud? You made this happen. Didn't he? You're going to just throw Sarai under the bus?

Who had the ability to write? That responsibility, guys, lays right here. It's why you're a man and not a woman.

Now, how you go about using that authority needs to reflect Ephesians 5. Doesn't it, guys? You love your wife as Jesus loves His bride. Well, that's humongous, isn't it?

Alright, I won't unpack that right now. We'll see where that takes us. I think it's clear to everybody who's an adult in the room what happened here between these two people.

[ 62 : 14 ] It's hard for us, though, to accept that Sarai came to believe this was God's will. But here's the thing. Again, I'm just trying to give you some nuggets to help you understand this. A determined desperation can make us vulnerable to deception.

Self and satanic deception. A determined desperation. Sarai is desperate and now in her desperation she's become determined.

Man, you mix those two things without the Lord and you're in trouble. I am determinedly desperate. And I'm going to find a way.

Because this is what I want. And off to the races they go. Deception often ends in defilement. What does defilement mean? It means to pollute or to corrupt. So the world's wisdom births corruption in our relationship with God and with those around us.

[ 63 : 21 ] And you'll see it. You'll hear it. You'll feel it in your relationships. Because worldly wisdom promotes self. Worldly wisdom teaches you to cope instead of hope.

That's what I came to realize when I first started in ministry and I was trying to use the tools they taught me in psychology, in humanistic psychology. I'm just teaching people to cope. I don't... I don't...

That's not what I'm doing in my life and in my marriage. I'm not just trying to cope. I want to get beyond that. That's not a life. Look at what the Bible says.

Also, it is not good for a person to be without knowledge. He who hurries his footsteps sins. But that's exactly what that determined desperation does to you.

It puts you in hurry mode. Let's get what I want. Let's get this thing done. Let's make this thing better. Let's make this thing better. And God doesn't always hurry you out of it.

[ 64 : 22 ] The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that one may avoid the snares of death. You want to avoid that kind of stuff? Then live in the fear of the Lord.

The entire book of Ecclesiastes is about that, isn't it? The fear of the Lord is living in a high and holy reverence for God. You're fearful of sinning because you don't want to hurt the Lord. It's not about whether or not you're going to get what you want in that moment.

It's about, am I responding to God so that I can please Him in the way that I think, in what I say, in what I do in these moments, in this situation?

Abram's complicity is shocking. It's predictable. It's shocking. It's tragic. We could have predicted this would happen because sinful deception always births sinful actions.

And we see what kind of form this deception takes in their life. It's an ungodly plan by desperate, dejected Sarai. We want to tell her, Sarai, having a baby is not going to cause all your problems to go away because having a baby is not going to change your heart toward the Lord.

[ 65 : 34 ] I've already pointed out the fact of its predictability is laid down for us in principle in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve. We see this happen in their life. This is shocking because we hear the plan and our senses are kind of arrested and assaulted with the wrong of it.

How could she get here? That's exactly what I told you. They're going to get to the point where they're going to look back and go, how did we get here? Well, you're seeing it unfold. You have the benefit of seeing how it unfolded.

It's tragic because the consequences are absolutely brutal for them. I'm going to get to those consequences, God willing, in my next message. My next message will deal with some of the brutal, brutal consequences of them choosing this path.

And you know what? They're not going to be able to wiggle out of it. They're going to live in those consequences until they die. And then many people who come after them are going to struggle in those consequences as well.

They're not being punished by God for Abram's sin. They're having to live in the consequences of decisions that Abram made in a sinful way. You hear me? We don't believe in generational sin here at Grace.

[ 66 : 41 ] We don't believe that God punishes your children for your sins or you for your father and mother's sins. That's not biblical. But you might live under the consequences of their sin.

You see the difference? You may have to live with their sinful decisions as those decisions impact your life. But God isn't punishing you for their sin. Alright?

That's another message. Finally, I want to get to this one quickly. The world's wisdom demands. Demands what? Our allegiance.

You see this in 5 and 6. Look what happened. Sarai said to Abram, May the wrong done to me be upon you. You know, I gave my maid into your arms.

You understand what she's saying there? I made this kind of good for you, dude. But when she saw that she had conceived, Hagar had conceived, I was despised in Hagar's sight.

[ 67 : 37 ] And now Sarai's mad. May the Lord judge between you and me. And Abram, he cops out again. Your maid is in your power. You do whatever you want. You women, take this and go somewhere else with it.

And figure it out. Don't bother me anymore. I'm out of this. And off he goes. Now that sounds like a coward to me.

That doesn't sound like wisdom. Worldly wisdom wants its way. And it'll have it. The reality of the failure and folly of this plan now hits this couple with full force.

And we're tempted to say, what is she so upset about? What did she expect after all? Well, Sarai, she's incensed because she thought she was doing the right thing. I think she did think that.

Abram's cooperation in it probably further suggested to her the rightness of it. Oh, well, he's good with it. It must be all right. So she assessed her situation without the benefit of using her spiritual eyes of faith in the Lord because as I've said, polygamy was never God's plan.

[ 68 : 46 ] Sarai's incensed. She's indignant with Abram. She feels she gave up a lot. Abram, he's not giving up much. So she's getting the entire backlash from this deal going sour and she says, wah, it's not fair.

When it all blew up in her face, she comes to Abram, she demands justice. Here's, listen, she demands a change in circumstances. Hey, you, you, Abram, change this.

Ow. She even pulls out the big guns. She insists that God's going to judge between them who is to blame. Why would she say that? Because she's convinced that God's going to judge Abram.

Oh, you'll see. We'll get God in on this thing and he'll show you. So now we're going to weaponize God against our spouse. Get him, God.

That's what she's doing. Worldly wisdom demands its own way. It doesn't teach you selflessness, sacrifice, patience. Sarai does exactly what the world does when it doesn't get its way.

[ 69 : 53 ] What does she do? She gives voice to the ways of the world when it feels it's been wrong. No fair. I'm innocent. I'm a victim. And then she demands her rights.

Abram's response? Put it back on her. And that's terrible. He's saying, don't put me in the middle of this, Sarai. You do whatever you feel you have to do, but leave me out of it. You have the power to do whatever you want to her.

You're the woman around here and you're kind of letting everybody know it. So go do what you've got to do. Worldly wisdom won't allow you to serve two masters.

But more importantly, God will not allow you to serve two masters. He will allow you to live in the consequences of the bed you make. It doesn't sound as if it ended well and it didn't.

We're meant to see the tragic, hurtful, ongoing consequences of living in a worldly wisdom of compromise. You remember our WAIT acronym?

[ 70 : 57 ] And I'll close with this. Remember our WAIT acronym from a few messages ago, a couple messages ago? He's supposed to be waiting on the Lord. Watch for God's goodness.

Adorn God's truth. Invest in God's people. And thank God for His blessings. Watch for God's goodness. Look for the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit and the blessings of God in your life.

What does that do? It takes the focus off of you. When we get into these contexts, we're so self-focused. We're so focused on us and our plan and what we don't have. We need to get out of that and see that I'm breathing God's air right now, you know.

And God's blessed me. Look at the potential that I have. How much am I wasting? How much am I forfeiting, whining, and making it about me? See?

This is very sobering, folks. Adorn God's truth. That is, live the beauty and wonder of Jesus as truth in you. Jesus is living in me as a Christian.

[ 71 : 59 ] What difference is He making in my life in this situation? Invest in God's people. Another one that says, get beyond you.

Stop making it about you. Selflessly love as God loves you. One of the things that I tell people when we get into things like this and start counseling is we need to find ways to get you out of you and get you serving others.

And let's start with your spouse. What does serving your spouse look like? Because that's going to help get you out of some of that. You with me? You see? You tell your kids this when they're pitching a fit.

One of the things we wanted to teach our kids when the fit would come was this is about you. So we'd help them get over the fit. And once we helped them get over the fit, then we would sit down with them and start talking to them about taking that energy and investing it in productive things. God honoring things. And then thank God. You know why? Because thankfulness to God comes from a heart captivated with God. Do you hear me? Thankfulness to God comes from a heart captivated with God.

[ 73 : 05 ] When we become unthankful, it's one of the first signs in our life that I have jettisoned my heart being captivated with the Lord, humbled by God, made tender and kind and loving and patient because God is so loving and kind and tender and patient with me.

Jeff, it's easy for me to forgive in this context because I've been meditating on how much God's forgiven me. See? It's that.

Well, they didn't wait on the Lord, did they? They didn't make it about the Lord. They did what was right in their own eyes. But God's purposes weren't thwarted. This is where we're going to leave it. Thirteen years are going to pass from this. Abram's going to be 99. His wife Sarai is going to be 89 and they're going to have Isaac, the son of laughter, the promised heir.

God's going to bless Hagar and Ishmael. So, even your sin can't thwart God's plan to be good to you, beloved. There are consequences when we sin and we may have to live with those the rest of our lives but we don't have to live without joy or hope.

[ 74 : 20 ] And we can live in the forgiveness of God. We need to learn to look to, to listen to and to wait on God. And that is a process in the Christian life, isn't it? Will you join me in prayer?

Father, we have covered a lot of territory today as I have endeavored to pastorally encourage your people with the truth and the blessedness of walking in your wisdom and subscribing to your wisdom in hunting down, as it were, ferreting out your wisdom in the Word of God.

You've given us everything we need, you said, for life and for godliness in the Scriptures. leaders. And so when it comes to soul care, when it comes to us looking to you to heal us and to help us navigate the various trials and challenges and sufferings of life, the problems of life, we turn to you for that wisdom.

We turn to you to help us as your people, to be our dad. So Father, thank you for your wisdom today. Help us to take it into our hearts.

Help us to trust you to lead us. And for all the married couples in our congregation today who are either currently in a situation where they're finding themselves dealing with these challenges or for those who will likely very soon enter into one, help these folks to be faithful to you and to trust you, God.

[ 75 : 50 ] And help us to be willing to come alongside of each other and walk in the messiness of what this can sometimes be so that we can bear the burden with each other and share the love of Jesus, the hope of Christ.

It's in His name we pray. Amen.