A Life Defined by Faith In God: Laboring for God

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Date: 02 November 2025

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[0:00] All right, dear ones, we are in Genesis. And today, we are concluding chapter 17.

! It is a life lived by faith and not by sight.
We don't live by what we see as reactionaries to the things of life. We're not constantly reacting to what life does to us.
We are settled in a life of faith so that as life comes at us, we make a calculated faith response to God. In those circumstances. Why?
Because we know who God is and we know that God is in control. And so we don't react like things are spinning out of control. We respond to these situations by responding to God.
[1:16] We respond in the knowledge of the Lord. This is what these messages have been about because this is what God is calling Abraham to do. So as we deal with this this morning, that's actually the wrong slide.

So, yes, that's okay. It's not y'all. It's us. I think, right? It's probably us. So this is what it should say. It's okay. It should say laboring for God.
That was, I think, last week. So this one should say, ah, no, that's not it either. Laboring for God. And the reference is Genesis 17, 23 through 27.
23 through 27. And what I'd like to do is read through chapter 17 and get the overall feel for what's going on. I've had a number of sermons now in this passage and we'll finish out today.
Now, when Abram, his name is still Abram here, was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless.
[2:26] Or that's another way of saying fear God. Have a high and holy reverence for him. I will establish, God says, my covenant between me and you. This is something God will do.

And I will multiply you exceedingly. Well, now, look at this response to God revealing his character to Abram and telling him this promise.
Abram fell on his face. And God talked with him. As for me, God said, behold, my covenant is with you. And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.
No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham. For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you.
And kings will come forth from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you.
[3:33] I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.

I will be their God. If you go back up to verse 2 and just follow along, you'll see I will establish.
I will multiply. Then at the end of verse 3, you will be. That is, by the power of God doing this, you will be this.
In verse 5, your name shall be Abraham. That's God's changing, God's doing, and it reflects His authority over Abraham to name him. For I have made you, God says.
In verse 6, I will make you. Again, I will make. Verse 7, I will establish. Verse 8, I will give. At the end of verse 8, I will be.
[4:35] And now there's this huge transition based on who God is and what He has said He will do in the covenant. In verse 9, He says, Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your descendants after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your

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foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.
And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations. A servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your descendants.
A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised. Thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people.
He has broken My covenant. Then in verse 15, God said to Abraham, As for Sarai, your wife. In other words, God has given His role.
[5:54] Here's what I'm going to do. I will do. Here's what you will do, Abraham. And now I'm going to tell you what your wife's role in all of this covenant stuff is.

As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her.
Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations. Wow. Kings of peoples will come from her. Now this is a woman that's been barren her entire adult life.
So at 89 years old, this promise is being made to her. Then Abraham, what did he do in verse 17, Church, he fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, Will a child be born to a man 100 years old?
And will Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. But God said, No, no.
[7:00] Sarah, your wife, will bear you this son, and you shall call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

So we have, As for me, in verse 3, As for you, in verse 9, As for Sarah, in verse 15, and now look at verse 20, As for Ishmael, I've heard you.
Behold, I will bless him and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of 12 princes. And I will make, God will stand behind this, I will make him a great nation.
And so you see here, the promise of an Arab nation. But my covenant, I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.
Then when God finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. And now today, Then Abraham took Ishmael, his son, and all the servants who were born in his house, and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day as God had said to him.
[8:21] So this is immediate obedience. Now Abraham was 99 years old when he himself was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael, his son, was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

In the very same day, Abraham was circumcised and Ishmael, his son. All the men of his household who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner were circumcised with him.
Oh, and okay, there it is. You found it. Thank you, brother. So there it is. A life defined by faith in God laboring for God. And laboring simply stresses the reality that we are to obey.
We are to act in obedience on the faith that we have in God's character and His calling on our life.
Now, let me say these few things to you. Friends, I know I have kept you in the weeds of Genesis 17 for some time now.
And I realize that. Now, there's always a danger when we start doing a deep dive, slowing down and looking into these insights. There's always a danger we'll lose the bigger picture.
[9:34] It'll fade away and we'll kind of get lost in the weeds. I'm not going to let that happen to us. I've tried to keep us in the big picture of this issue of faith. Living in relationship to God by faith.

Today, I'm going to pull back just a bit and I'm emphasizing the obedient faith of Abraham toward his Lord.
God said all these things. He's going to do all these things. He's promised all these things. He's called out individuals in Abraham's life to talk about what covenant relationship looks like.
And now it comes down to, Abraham, you need to follow through and do what I've said to do. Your first step of obedience and all that I've just outlined is for you to get circumcised and circumcise all the men in your household.
First step. Nothing else goes beyond this until you get this part done. His obedience, Abraham's obedience is his faith response to how God wants Abraham to relate to him.

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[10:44] Now let me say that again. This is where you start gaining insight into how God operates with his faith people.

People who know him by saving faith. Listen, Abraham's obedience is his faith response to how God wants Abraham to relate to him.
Abraham didn't get to pull back and sit there and think about this whole thing about the covenant and go, yeah, you know, this circumcised thing? I don't think so. I don't think we're going to do that. He doesn't get to debate that. This is part of what God requires and so this is what he has to do. These are his marching orders. Now here's where you can extrapolate and begin to think about this as it relates to your life.
How does God want you to relate to him? Are you flying in the dark? Are you flying by the seat of your pants in your relationship with God?
[11:47] Are you clear and becoming clearer each week of your life in your walk with God how God wants you to walk with him by what he's revealed to you in his word?

That's how you know, right? It's not a guessing game. So I'm going to do this with you throughout this message and I have been doing this. When you ask yourself, how does God want me to relate to him as God based on my role as a husband?
Now I'm doing that because Abraham's a husband and where has his Achilles heel been in his walk with God? In his relationship with his wife. He's given her up to another man to be violated to save his own skin.
That's pretty weak, don't you think, guys? Yeah. And I wonder how his wife felt about that and I wonder how they reconciled that together after the fact.
I wonder if she pulled him into the tent and said, I got some things to say to you, bub. And they went at it. I don't know. How does God want you to relate to him as a wife in your role as a wife?
[13:01] Because he hasn't left that a secret. How does God want you to relate to him in your situation in life given things that have happened to you in the last two years? What kinds of things have happened to you in the last two years that have a bearing on how you understand how God wants you to relate to him based on what he's told you in the word?

Do you see what we're doing here? This is instruction for Abraham. It's also instruction for Israel. And as Israel sits and listens to this, they have to ask themselves, what is God telling us as a nation that he wants from us in the way of a faith response to who he is?
So how do you respond to God in faith given any situation in your life that you recently encountered? Maybe it's a relational issue with somebody in your life.
Maybe it's an issue at work. Maybe it's a big decision that you need to come to. Or maybe it's just the everyday stuff of life as you parent and as you go about living your life.
Well, like Abraham, it is about your response of faith in God's character. His character never changes. There is no shifting shadow in the Lord.
[14:24] His character is rock solid. And so your faith response in God's character is at the best place it can possibly be. It's as protected and safeguarded and sure as any faith response could be.

You can trust God's character. And this is how he wants you to live your life. So you avoid the roller coaster. You can make wise decisions in this promise-making, promise-keeping God.
So as I close out chapter 17, just please remember, this is why I'm taking pains with this, please remember, each point in this outline stresses an aspect of God's goodness in his covenant relationship with you.
Each of these points, these major points, are stressing some aspect of God's goodness based in his character in his covenant relationship with you in Christ.
Like Abraham, you have a covenant relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. That's the basis of your walk with the Lord.
[15:34] If you don't have a faith response toward Jesus Christ, you can't have a relationship with God, can you? So everything hinges on this.

Now what I've told you in the past, as we walk through this chapter, I began with look to God. And what I mean by that is you are making an emphasis in your life, in your walk, on God's character. You look to God and that stresses your need to know and trust his character in his covenant relationship with you in Christ.
You first look to the Lord and you understand and know and get to know his character. You ground your life in the unshifting, unfading, promised character of God.

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Man, what better basis for living life than the character of the Lord, right? That's where you camp out. God's Then, we talked about listening to God.
[16:46] And what we mean by that is as you look to God and trust in his character, you then open your heart and your mind to hear what God gives you in the way of instruction about knowing him and living for him.

And that comes as an emphasis on God's word. You listen to God and you stress your need to know and trust his word, what he's spoken about revealing himself in his covenant relationship with you and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Now, time and again, Israel, the original recipients of this information in chapter 17, Israel is going to neglect and they are going to rebel against this instruction in their covenant with the Lord.
They're going to claim Abraham as their father and Jesus is going to have to one day come and rebuke them and say, Abraham is not your father because you do not do what Abraham did.
You do not relate to God by faith. Jesus is going to just put it right out there to them. Then he's going to tell them, you speak to me and try to relate to me with your lips, but your heart is far from me.
[18:07] This is how it's all going to come to a head in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, here's what I want to ask you when these two realities that I've got up here, these two major points are not helping to define who you are and how you go about living your life.

This is the question. You see it just come up on the screen there. How are God's people affected when they don't live in the wisdom of his covenant design? You say, Jeff, can you be saved and not live in the wisdom of God's covenant design?
Yes, you can. You can love the Lord and be saved, and yet you can remain shallow, spiritually shallow, you can remain ignorant, and you can even be disobedient.
Now, God will chastise you, but that can be indicative of your life. I've known these folks, I've seen these people, I've done this in my life at times. It doesn't have to be that way, but you think about that question now.
When we don't look to God to honor His character, we lose sight of the truth of who God is.
[19:23] God is. And we can't know who God made us to be, and we cannot know why we are here apart from a true knowledge of the Lord.

If we don't know the Lord in terms of His character, His wisdom, if we don't get to know more of who He is, then we're not going to be able to live to His honor.
And we lose sight of this. So listen to this. Who is God, and why does that make all the difference in how I respond in life?
For people who don't know the Lord, even for people who think they do and say they do, but you look at their life and see no spiritual fruit at all. They pretty much live their life the way they want to live it.
They live it on their terms and they bring God in when they want to. God with a little G, not a capital G. What happens to people's lives when they come to know who God is and then ask the question, is who God is in my life making all the difference in how I respond in life?
[20:46] What does God have to do with the way that I make decisions every day? Where I spend God's money every day? What kind of priority I put on how I respond to other people?

And what my priorities in life are? Knowing God and His covenant love for you answers vital questions about your life such as this.
It answers why I'm here. God so this has to do with your identity and purpose. So many of us struggle with this even as adult people.
You say, Jeff, how does that manifest? Well, you see people struggling with the fear of man. That is, they have to have the approval of other people in their life. Why? Because they're so insecure in their identity.
They're so insecure in their purpose. they never can quite feel grounded. And so that leads to all kinds of issues.
[21:50] Folks, listen, when we do not listen, when we do not listen to God to honor His Word, we neglect what God has said and apart from what God has said, we live by what seems right in our own eyes.

You have two options in this. Just like Abraham. right now. You can live by what's right in your own eyes or you can live by what God says is right.

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That's it. There aren't any other options and there's no blending them. You get into sin because you live by what's right in your own eyes.
This also answers this question, what I am to do with my life. So this covers the issues of priority and direction. What should be the priorities of my life and how should those priorities help direct my life?
Well, you say, what's most important to God? What is most important to God? That I should adopt that priority or priorities and then that my life should look like that, shouldn't it?
[23:01] It should follow through. Now, let me look, do you know why more preachers don't preach the text of scripture like this and call God's people to faithfulness?

Do you know why they don't do that? Because it runs people off. Because people don't want to give up one or perhaps their only day off and come and sit under a preacher who's constantly challenging them to walk more closely to God and make it about God and not about themselves and getting all in their business and saying if you're not living for the Lord and you've come in to worship today God doesn't receive that because that's a hypocritical heart this is exactly what Jesus did didn't he and they hated him for it and they put him on a cross so you know I don't expect a bunch!
when I sit down and craft these messages from the text of scripture and I pray and ask God to help me do that my greatest and highest priority is that that message is pleasing to God not you I want you to be blessed but I know the only way you'll be blessed is if I preach a message that pleases the Lord if it pleases God you're going to be blessed period even even if the guy up here doing it isn't that skilled or is growing in skill or whatever has an off day that doesn't change the power of the word does it so it doesn't depend on me I need to be faithful and I need to practice skill and cut it straight but we are looking to God's word to make the difference the word does the work now all of that is to say this is me expressing to you as a pastor and as a man and as a husband and as a dad I have to have my priorities and direction in line in order to be able to do that and to persevere in it week after week after week
I can either be at the lake through the week I could be in the! club I could be on the golf course there's a thousand things I could be doing and none of those things are bad in themselves but if I find those things taking me away from the priority of being able to bring God's word with skill and blessing and as a pleasure to God am I bringing pleasure to you right now Lord if anything gets in the way of that folks it's got to go I'm one of the most boring people you will ever encounter through the week in that regard but that's the commitment isn't it that's the commitment it's not a burden it's not a great sacrifice it's faithfulness I'm called to it and so are you so what does faithfulness look like in your walk with the Lord if you're not called to do this every Sunday you're still called to walk with the
Lord and be faithful to him right so what does that look like for you this is exactly what this text is supposed to do in the life of Israel right now Israel what does it look like for you to stand before the Lord and be faithful in what your father Abraham has set as an example and course for you as a nation!
[26:38] if you're not going to live by the same faith he lived by don't do that and they did do it and it was ruinous for them all right and then finally let me give you this one this is about how I'm to live and this involves your attitudes and actions so you have your identity and purpose grounded in the character of God you have your priorities and direction grounded in the character of God now you have your attitudes and actions what should our labor for the Lord look like is it some great burden you bear and you let everybody!

know! is it some great sacrifice that you feel like you're making for God people do this how are we to go about serving the Lord in response to who he is and what he has said to us in his word alright now that brings us to emphasize then our labor for the Lord and this is an emphasis on God's authority as you see it there on the!
an emphasis on God's authority in your life you do what you do because God has commanded it God has revealed it as such to you you are responding to his authority you're his child and so you do this you say yes father yes father and you move forward not because you have to because you want to God is teaching you to want what he wants for you you're not wired like that folks you need God to help you with your want and so do I right so laboring for God I'll put it up here on the screen laboring for God stresses our need to know and trust his authority in our covenant relationship with him through Jesus now there's a

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New Testament verse that I wanted to bring in here because it so concisely helps to explain the spiritual emphasis that we need in order to follow Abraham in this faith response to God so I'll put it up here just to save time for you it's Galatians 5 verse 6 for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything did you hear that but faith working through love now doesn't that sum it up you can't boast in circumcision or uncircumcision in any way because in Christ none of that matters what matters in Christ is your saving faith working through the love that God has shed in your heart so here's the question what does my faith in
God's character and my faith in God's word to me look like as I express that faith in a response of love to God and others what does my faith in the Lord look like as I express it in love to God and to others so we have a vertical and we have a horizontal emphasis in life in the way that we go about living out our faith works are important our works help demonstrate that saving faith is a reality for us but we're not brought into the kingdom by works are we no all right so Abraham look at this Abraham physically responded to God's covenant revelation in three related ways according to our text now here's where I'm going to start bringing out some of the text for you and summon all this up here we go first of all it says he fell on his face we
[30:55] I noted that for you in the reading in two different places in verses 3 and 17 Abraham it says fell on his face in verse 3 and God talked with him then in verse 17 then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart two circumstances and what we're dealing with here is worship from fear and awe so this is the biblical fear of the Lord grounded in this worship that Abraham is expressing to God in both of these situations from 3 and 17 Abraham is worshiping now that that's going to be very important here in a few minutes for you to start there and lay that as a groundwork otherwise you're going to misinterpret what that second instance of him falling on his face is okay you got to ask yourself what is the second instance here of falling on his face and laughing that doesn't immediately sound good so you've got to interpret this based on what you're seeing over here in verse 3 and bring them together then it says he laughed and said in his heart verse 17 and I understand this to be joy amidst human limitation this is a human joy a spiritual joy welling up in his soul for the

Lord but it's also expressing human limitation I'll talk more about that in a minute and then finally he circumcised the Bible says so he fell on his face he laughed and said in his heart and he circumcised his household he obeyed from thanksgiving or thankfulness in his heart those are three related ways that he's expressing a faith response to God in this covenant relationship so we start with this he fell on his face in verse three so this is his worship this is his faith in the Lord and I want you to take note that first and foremost this is his response Abraham is responding to something and to someone to whom and what well this response is the normal behavior of a worshiper now folks look let me just pause here and give you a quick pastoral deal I hear and have heard throughout my
Christian life people who talk very very casually about meeting with God they see God in the mirror they're shaving they're brushing their teeth and they get an image of God in the mirror which I think is so dangerous and then they talk to God through that image or they're praying and they get an image of God they're driving in the car I pray in the car and they're talking to God like they talk to a buddy sitting next to them or whatever I hear these stories and I think you know when I see people conversing with God and meeting with God in the Bible they're always in a posture of absolute humiliation as it were they're prone out before the Lord they're down on their knees you see this people who realized who Jesus was and they run up to him and what did they do they bow they fall on their faces before even the demons did that it's hard for me to find places in the
Bible where guys just walked around casually talking to God like he was one of their buds don't be fooled about this this is one of grace we won't do it God deserves to be worshipped in spirit and truth and that brings us to the throne of grace with great humility with a sense of contriteness and brokenness in our heart but also with a sober spirit that has joy and gratitude that we can come to God the God of the universe and worship him and it be received because he's received us in his son and so we make much of the cross don't we we we don't want to be stuck up we don't want to be stuffy we don't want to be academic and proud we just want to be people who come in here and offer genuine worship to God right you want to sing songs that honor the Lord and you want to bring honor to God and we want to cue you to do that are you with me thank you
I'm off the soapbox now I'm back down to my text and off we go it is the normal response of a worshiper who is looking to God to bow before the Lord like this this is someone who is seeking the

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heart of the Lord so this is what you want your spiritual posture to be as you come to worship God if you have any doubts at all what should my spirit be like as I come into this place to worship with these people what should I be nurturing and cultivating it should be a heart like this it is a humble heart that is bowed before God that is the heart that seeks the Lord bow before the Lord be teachable be receptive!
[36:37] be ready don't be proud let God speak to you through his word and convict you so this attitude of the heart in response to God that is where obedience begins obedience begins with a contrite humble heart before the Lord and without that heart of worship we cannot please the Lord right so we need this look at what the Bible says without faith it is impossible to please him for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him that heart I bring that that heart wants to bow before God doesn't it because it's seeing God for who he is and so that puts me right down bowed before the Lord so I say this we must believe that God is and that means that we must believe not simply in his existence like so many say they do but also believe in

God as he has revealed himself in the Bible especially in the person of Jesus Christ and that's what keeps us honest this is how all the people of Hebrews chapter 11 the hall of faith believed in God they had a biblically defined they had a covenant defined God defined faith in who God is they didn't get to just make it up and this is how Abraham believed and the reason I'm making such a big deal of this is this reason this is how Israel must believe in their relationship with God this is laying the groundwork Moses here laying the groundwork for how Israel is to think about saving faith what it means to walk with God as a nation and not just give him lip service which is what they came to do so many of them and came under severe judgment so
I say that this is a God defined belief this is a God given gift of faith so it's the bedrock of every true relationship with God we can't stop preaching that folks friends we have got to preach the gospel of saving faith because people need to be constantly reminded that this is a walk of faith and that faith is a gift of God and we need to be stewards of that we have a privilege and responsibility looking to God and listening to God are the places where the Christian life life with God begins!
We look to God we listen to God that godly faith first puts us in an attitude of worship of God which I'm going to say is a posture of the heart toward the Lord and that will tell itself in a posture of life toward the Lord over the course of time a posture of heart toward the Lord in worship will show up in a posture of life toward the Lord in worship so no doubt we see humility here we see something else we see a teachable spirit here don't we Abraham is proving teachable before the Lord we see that because he lived it out in obedience we see a heart bowing itself to its maker the creature bowing to its creator but will Abraham's lifestyle tell the same story will his life show evidence of knowing
God and listening to God in the way which God has defined for Abraham in this covenant relationship or is Abraham going to sail off over here and kind of do his own thing for a while there are so many people that seem to preach this and think that it's okay they seem to accept the fact they say all of us are going to drift at times we're all going to sail off over here and kind of do our own thing and I say to you no it doesn't have to be like that it's not supposed to be like that so I'm going to preach tightening that up Abraham's faith progressed!
[41:18] rest and persevered if you were here last Wednesday night you heard me teach on this to further emphasize this heart attitude is the foundation of genuine relationship with God you go back to Mark 10 17 would you turn there with me real quick Mark 10 17 please don't think that this is not all over the New Testament this is the story of the rich young ruler!

as we call him refer to him and as Jesus was setting out on a journey a man ran up to Jesus and what did he do knelt before him and then he asked Jesus good teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life now we give this guy credit because he's hitting the question isn't he that's the best question you can ask Jesus but now compare his outward!
posture of kneeling before Jesus and asking the ultimate question of Jesus with his inward posture down in verse 22 but at these words the young man was saddened and he went away grieving for he was one who owned much property do you see the difference he asked the question Jesus gave him the truthful life saving answer and the guy left Jesus standing there and walked away from life he walked away from the Lord why because Jesus said you know I know your heart and right now your heart is all wrapped up in the idols of stuff so here is what I want you to do go get rid of all your idols and then come back to me and the guy said I ain't doing it I ain't doing it and he went away sad

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and grieved this is a guy who came before
Jesus and said I've kept all the law oh really what about Mark chapter 4 I'll put that up there too Mark chapter 4 you may remember this one this is Jesus teaching on the soils we've mentioned it before the soil represents the heart of a person your inner spiritual self and only one of the soils produced the crop of genuine faith didn't it and this is exactly what Jesus did in his explanation of this parable when you get down to verse 20 and those are the ones on whom seed was sown the seed is what church what's the what the word thank you brother the seed is the word so that seed the word was sown on the good soil the prepared soil of a teachable heart a receptive heart and these people hear that word and accept it and what else do they do we can't leave that one out bear fruit they receive it and they bear fruit now do you see what
I'm preaching to you this morning you have this! in the character of God and now that faith should respond to God in a way where it bears the fruit of God's character in your life you should be bearing the fruit of God's character in your life love that genuine faith produces that is what it does and when you persevere and persist in it you grow in it and you reflect the character of God more and more and more and we call that what spiritual growth spiritual maturity we're hammering a lot of this on Wednesday night aren't we this is the way the Bible outlines it for us in Matthew 13 Jesus speaks of wheat representing those who have genuine faith and then he speaks of tares that represent those who do not have a God defined faith now here's what he said both wheat and tares grew up side by side in the farmer's field the tares are the weeds that look a lot like the plants that are growing up for them to harvest and an enemy came in and sowed those in the guy's field and so now he's got a problem he's got all of these plants that look like the real plants and now they're recognizing what's happening they look very similar but it's the wheat that's valuable to
[46:04] God and the farmer and the tares are not and so you see the illustration here of the wheat being the people of God who live in genuine faith and the tares are those who live in unbelief they can look and sound almost identical to each other they're very similar then well how do we tell them apart fruit what they bear weeds are not going to bear the heads of wheat are they no they're going to look very different at a point in their life when they're producing and so it's what they produce that begins to reveal the reality they can say!

I know God I know where I'm going when I die I'm going to heaven I'm a good person they can say all manner of things but what does their life produce and so this is why we need to preach this with great care I give you an illustration look most of you guys know that Suzanne and I like to garden and so we have a flower garden and we planted this last time we planted a variety of zinnias and one of us got carried away and the person didn't listen so I'm learning to listen now look as these flowers as these zinnias matured and began to bloom Suzanne and I noticed that some of the plants were not producing flowers and that was weird and so we let them go a little while to see what was happening because we planted some varieties we never done before well they turned out to be weeds and they the zinnias
I took pictures I'm like you have got to be kidding me that I would have sworn that was a zinnia coming up and it got that high but then it didn't produce any flowers and I'm walking around going what did I do wrong right and then when I realized what they were yeah you know what I did and I didn't think about Jesus example when he roots I yanked every one of them out and if I lost a few zinnia I was like sorry guys but these got to go I can't have weeds in the garden now look
Abraham's worship is the real thing it's the product of genuine faith he is bowing his face to the ground before the Lord because of the attitude of his heart his heart is bowed to God why suit and Israel needs to learn this truth about genuine faith when they consider the life of Abraham and follow his example the test is the genuine fruit of holiness lived out over time and through adversities that's the test Israel didn't keep to this teaching and even today they don't keep to it I want to show you just a couple places of this because I think it's important to the context and I know I'm not in every single verse in 17 I've already covered a lot of that I'm going to cover the last part here in a minute look at Romans 9 I want to bring the New Testament in and show you this because this becomes so much the foundation for what we're going to see throughout the rest of the Bible as the Jews claim to be real Jews true Jews in in the line of Abraham and Jesus is going to have to confront them and say that's not true about you
Romans 9 and I'm going to take you down to verse 6 but it is not as though the word of God has failed for they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel do you see his point here not everyone who claims to be faithful Jews are faithful Jews not all of the people in Israel are believing

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in God the way they say they do nor are they all!
[50:27] children because they are Abraham's descendants that's what they say well we're Abraham's descendants oh yeah through Isaac your descendants will be named no that is it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants now notice verse 9 and what is that promise based on for this is the word of promise at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a those who have come in the same faith as Abraham as he believed that God would give him Isaac those are the people who are true in the Lord if you look down at chapter 10 of Romans look at what Paul says here brothers my heart's desire and my prayer to God for Israel that's the context is for their salvation for I testify about

Israel that they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge for not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes see they're not believing in Christ and so they're not saved even though they claim descendants from Abraham even though they claim!
as Jews who believe in God Israel's zeal and worship were not based in a God defined genuine faith it wasn't they looked to their heritage as descendants of Abraham law keepers we've been circumcised we're living in the tradition of the elders they made God in their own image they related to God in what they designed as worship their religion and their faith were all about them doing what was right in their own eyes and so many people who claim to be Christians live like this and take this attitude if you look at Romans 9 31 and 32 this is really sad but Israel pursuing a law of righteousness did not arrive at that law why because they did not pursue it by faith but as though it were by works they stumbled over the stumbling stone it is written behold
I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense what is that and he who believes in him will not be disappointed now this tells us that Israel was self deceived and pursued a relationship with God of their own making so dangerous they pursued a righteousness of their own based on their own perspective do you remember when we were talking about perspective in the last message it's got to be based in what the Lord has revealed but these people are living and worshiping according to the externals of religion not according to faith they didn't labor in faith they labored in vain these people are going to stand before God one day folks and they're going to hear depart from me I never knew you after all their religiosity it's not going to count for anything even though Israel went through the motions prescribed by God's law they missed the true relationship with
God through faith in the Lord Jesus verse 32 why what's the answer because they did not pursue it by faith but as though it were by works they stumbled over the stumbling stone who's the stumbling stone verse 33 him Paul Paul the apostle goes on to say that if notice Romans 10 9 and 10 if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved for with the heart a person believes resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation whoever believes in him him will not be disappointed it's the same him that he's talking about up in verse 33 the same!
[54:55] so this is a! take heed Christian moment now look I want to put this up there as well here's the verses why all this talk about the posture of the heart about genuine faith false faith and true worship Jeff what is all this all right look fair question Abraham fell on his face in a hard attitude of worship because of what God had taught his heart to believe about who God is in relationship to Abraham that's what he's doing with me that's what he's doing with you he's teaching you how to have a relationship with him based on who he is you neglect getting to know the Lord and you are going to remain spiritually anemic stunted you're not going to grow is that bad yeah it's bad you're going to miss a lot of usefulness to

God you may make heaven but you'll miss a lot of usefulness to the Lord and the people around you who could be so blessed won't be knowing God creates genuine worship and genuine worship cultivates the fear of the Lord I can't say that more with more importance listen knowing God creates genuine worship you can't help but worship him when you know him truly know in faith and genuine worship cultivates the fear of the Lord in your life and without the fear of the Lord you will not live a godly life it's impossible and so he fell on his face it's the posture of a seeker a worshiper but then he did this he fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart what are we supposed to do!
that in wonder in the fear of the Lord and I'm going to explain this to you wonder in the fear of the Lord because folks if you haven't tuned in very well till now please in the last time here hear this

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hear this please how are we to understand Abraham laughing in response to what God said to him we have to be very careful here how do we understand this keep in mind in response to what God said he laughed at what God said to him that doesn't sound immediately like a response of worship does it not of God and then he said some things in his heart I believe it is partly his heart's worship which involves his awe and respect and delight in the
Lord I think that's part of this laughing and what he said in his heart I think it's also the wonder joy and sheer shock of his heart being stretched to the limits of human faith when I say human faith I mean his ability to believe as he looks to the Lord so that it reflects a measure of doubt due to this human weakness so he's expressing awe respect delight wonder joy shock and even even elements of doubt have you ever been there before it's almost too good to take in and you just you're just immediately thinking no yes no yes right I think I think this is what's happening with Abraham he's just consumed with this this is the first time that God has made clear his intention to use
Sarah to produce the promised heir this clearly that we know of so Abraham is trying to take it all in and it's we would say blowing his mind his heart is racing to catch up with what is being said God's words are like a new reality from what Abraham has been operating in it's why he listened to Sarah in the first place and went with Hagar because he thought well God said it's going to come from my body he didn't make specific that it's going to be Sarah but what Abraham should have done was go you know what she's my wife so this must include her because she's my wife I don't need to go get another wife with this wife and take this on my own don't we do that now I preach that sermon already so I'll avoid the temptation to do that but it's true he should have realized this but this is the first time that it's been very very clear no and
[60:00] I do I think his heart is just racing to catch up with this new reality I think he's going not Ishmael not Ishmael really wait it has to be Ishmael oh Lord oh Lord that Ishmael might live before you God is so patient and compassionate with us isn't he he's so tender with us when we show such dullness and slowness in our understanding and so I want to ask you what is God teaching you lately what is God teaching you lately and are you attuned are you alert are you receptive are you ready are you defining it spiritually are you even trying what are your circumstances that's always how he does it he always does it through trying circumstances trials sufferings challenges if you say to yourself no things are just kind of smooth right now

I'm just kind of moving along doing my thing going okay that's fine where's God in all that where's God in all that if you were to lose everything you have in the way of your stuff and your physical blessing like Job where would you be in your walk with the Lord you see you'd have to ask yourself is God enough is it enough for me to have Jesus and nothing else is enough to walk away from everything that I have if that's what God says and if that's what God requires as long as I have Jesus now that's not pie in the sky it's not meant to guilt you it's meant to sober you it's meant to put you in the moment of Abraham here are you going to walk with the Lord and do what
I say if you think getting circumcised at 99 years old was an easy thing you think again some of you ladies may struggle with that but ask your man about that this is not an easy thing to do it is not an easy thing to follow through on it is required and so we have a lot of men all the men in Abraham's household are going to be out of commission right where does he live again what's all around him enemies and he's going down for a while is that trust do we even think about this kind of stuff this is his context what's it going to cost me to say yes to Jesus in this moment in this situation with this thing what's it going to cost and am
I going to see that as some big sacrifice I'm making for God or is this the everyday course of me trying to be faithful and persist in what God is requiring of me regardless of how it looks in Mark's life or Matt's life or Solomon's life what does God require!
of me what is God teaching you lately well I believe we're seeing the expression of God's goodness and his patience with Abraham in this moment it's an important turning point in Abraham's walk with God he fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart I think God's giving Abraham time to take it in this is almost too good to be true I've watched my wife for her entire adult life now she's almost 90 years old I've watched her live in the shame of barrenness her entire life and now you're telling me that at 90 years old God you're going to give her a baby you're going to take all that shame away in a moment and you're going to promise her and bless her that from this one child millions and millions of people are going to come to follow me wow what a good God this is the fear of the

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[64:27] Lord at work in Abraham's heart here it is and he said in his heart will a child be born this is a heart hard at work trying to drink in the reality of a gracious truth a blessed promise this is Mary standing before the angel and being told the holy one will come from your womb and Mary trying to take it in wait a minute how will this happen since I've never known a man that's not a question that's doubting God in his ability and promise that's a heart that can't take it in what really and I think that's where God wants us to live I really do shame on Jeff Jackson that there have been times in my life where I as a

Christian looked up into heaven and said I'm bored what you get to walk with the God of the universe and you're bored yeah that's not a heart that's right with me Abraham I think he's in awe of what God's telling him listen I want to share this with you this is from Thomas Manton he's a Puritan was a Puritan pastor and he described what he calls I'm going to put it up here on the screen look at this servile fear listen the wicked fear of God the wicked fear God because they have drawn an ill picture of him in their minds they perform only a little unwilling and unpleasing service and as little as they can because of their mistaken and perverted understanding of God he calls that servile fear it's not the fear of the Lord it's something very different this is not what Abraham had it's not the kind of service we see
Abraham performing in the latter part of chapter 17 Abraham is not doing what he's doing in terror of God he doesn't have any wicked fear of God from a wrong picture of God in his mind and listen in addition to this notice there are two strong contextual reasons I believe Abraham's laugh is not a mocking laugh but it's a laugh of stunned awe and worship again his heart in faith is racing to catch up with what he's hearing and it's left him almost speechless!
what? really? right? it's it's better than the people showing up at your house with the lottery thing and saying you just won the ten million dollar jackpot and you step back and go what? this is two strong contextual reasons for this that I want to put up here number one God does not rebuke him you'd expect that if this was a mocking I don't believe you nonsense!
affirms his plan to open Sarah's womb bless her and God affirms Abraham's concerns for Ishmael he doesn't blow by that either number two God provides the name Isaac he didn't give this name to the boy of promise to chide or to scold Abraham Isaac isn't to be a reminder of Abraham's weakness his mocking doubt or his fear no laughter is the name God gives to Isaac because Isaac will bring much joy to his parents hearts every time Isaac's name is mentioned Abraham's heart should just leap with joy at this moment of promise and blessing it's wonderful I don't think that Abraham is laughing because he's mocking the Lord or deriding the Lord or he has some kind of unbelief problem going on with God no I think Isaac's name is going to remind them of the incredible joy and responsive worship in the very moment that
[68:38] Sarah knew she was pregnant for the first time in her life at 89 years old she'll have the baby I guess at 90 God fulfilled his promise at this time next year she's going to have a baby Abraham it's going to be your baby with her the two of you like I designed it from the beginning!

Abraham is exhibiting what we would call filial fear not servile fear this is a very important distinction so I'll quote from Sinclair Ferguson what then is filial fear it is that indefinable mixture of both reverence and pleasure that's what I see happening it's joy and awe filling our hearts when we realize who God is and what he's done for us that's what Abraham is dealing with his heart is so full of an indefinable mixture of reverence respect pleasure joy awe love this wonderful great God who's revealing himself to Abraham and his promises to bless him in these incredible ways all of his household is going to realize this bump is going to grow in this woman who's been barren all this time and they're all going to see it and go they have a baby and
Abraham is going to tell every one of them well yeah God promised that that would happen and my God is a promise making promise keeping God and doesn't welch on what he tells us he'll do he gets to go out and do that it's wonderful oh if Israel is to truly follow in Abraham's example and claim to be his descendants they have to cultivate!
this fear of God as well I want to give you two references you can write them down I plan to turn to them but I've run out of time so let me just give them to you Deuteronomy 529 speaks of this followership of heart in likeness to Abraham in Jeremiah 32 38 through 40 Deuteronomy 529 and Jeremiah 32 38 through 40 now the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom or practical holiness because it's born in an undivided pure heart for the Lord and Jesus said the pure in heart are going to see God a pure heart fears God because it sees God as he is that's the key so a heart which fears the Lord learns to see life and to live it on the basis of such intimate knowledge of God let me

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give you a few more things to think about before I close Ferguson
Sinclair Ferguson whom I'm crediting with some of this teaching on filial fear Ferguson goes on to list several benefits of this kind of fear now I want you to notice this I use this in counseling quite a bit probably should do even more than I do filial fear pushes!
[71:48] all other fears! Do you struggle with anxiety worry? you have that kind of thing going on in your life? Filial fear pushes away all other fears because filial fear exposes the other fears for what they are irrational what do you have to fear as a child of God nothing but the world wants you to fear Satan wants you to fear and so the filial fear of the Lord the true fear of the Lord pushes all those other fears out leaves no room for them it also prevents us from continuing in sin I use this when I come across people who got a strong hold of sin in their life particular sin that continues to haunt them and defeat them I want to help them understand how to get past that how do you deal with those kind of sins in your life that just seem to have such a dominance over you filial fear puts integrity into

Christian character the filial fear of the Lord says this no I know no one is looking and I know no! one would ever enough I don't want to continue in this course of action I don't want to start this course of action I don't want to think these thoughts I want to continue in these thoughts because I know these thoughts please the Lord these actions please the Lord these don't and that's your starting place that's it builds integrity into your life it's doing the right thing!
even when no one's looking and not just because you know God is looking but because you know God is pleased with behavior and thinking that promotes the character of Jesus and then in harmony with that it promotes obedience in our lives and we see this filial fear in the way Abraham's walking with God in these final verses of the chapter where he follows through on circumcising all of the people all of the males in his household he is being obedient based on saving faith and what his God has told him notice finally he circumcised all the males in those final verses so we're talking about Abraham's willingness and faithfulness toward the Lord this wasn't too much for him he's not putting his faith in circumcision he's putting his faith in
God I want to read you a quick passage here before I put one other up to close out this is Galatians chapter 3 verses 6 through 9 even even so Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying all the nations will be blessed in you in other words I'm going to bring Messiah from you your bloodline and all those nations will be blessed in Him in that way.
Preaching the Gospel. Jesus is coming. You better look to Him in faith because only those in faith are the sons of Abraham. The true sons.
[75:26] So these efforts at obedience have to flow from a genuine faith of true worship in the Lord. And I want to bring this final passage from Galatians to close out today.

That's the passage I just read. And here's the final one. But may it never be that I would boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.
For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.
That's Paul. And that's what Israel is being called to live in chapter 17. Walk with God in the faith of Abraham and all will be well.
And so it is with us. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the depth and clarity of your word as we dig into these passages.
[76:32] We spent a good bit of time in chapter 17, Father, trying to discern the different aspects and insights of what it means to have saving faith and for that faith to lead us in the response of life as we encounter difficult people, as we encounter difficult circumstances, financial challenges, health challenges, all the different ways that this world reminds us that we are weak and you are strong.

The way the world and this life reminds us that this is not our home. Heaven is our home and this is temporary and we're sojourning here. All the ways that the world reminds us that these bodies that we have now are going to be shed off and we're going to get new bodies fit for eternity.
In all these ways, God, and more, we look to you in faith and ask you to help us to respond in a wonderful, strategic, and humbling way to who you are and your character and reflect that character to others in the way that we choose to live.

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Thank you for your word and thank you for the time that we've had to spend together in that word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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