

A Life Defined by Faith in God: Listening to God [Perspective]

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[0:00] All right, friends, we are in Genesis. We are moving right along. Well, kind of. You know, I've told you the story before Dr.

! MacArthur was asked. I try to do this somewhat like he does. He was asked one time about the length of his messages and he said, well, I can improve on it.

I can go slower and longer. And I thought, land's in. Man, all right. It's all good and it's rich, isn't it? It's rich.

And if we would just set our hearts to mine the truth of God's Word, there's enough in Genesis 17 to keep you busy for the rest of your life, much less the rest of the counsel of Almighty God.

But we are in Genesis 17, and this is what I'll be dealing with this morning. A life defined by faith in God is the overall theme we've been chasing here. Listening to God is what we've been zeroing in on.

[1:04] And this is the third message under listening to God. And we'll be talking about perspective today. Biblical, godly, heavenly, eternal perspective for life.

So what I'd like to do is read from Genesis 17, beginning in verse 1, and we'll be working our way down through verse 22 today. And I'll be focusing more or less on 15 through 22.

Now when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly. Well, Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him saying these things. As for me, 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.

[2:13] 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, 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.

I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, that is, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

God said further to Abraham, 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 foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

[3:23] 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.

Now, we spent a good bit of time on this issue of circumcision, and how it relates to the covenant, last time, last Sunday, when I brought the Word. From 15 on, look at this, Then God said to Abram, 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.

[4:33] Kings of peoples will come from her. Then Abram fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Now, he didn't say this out loud to God, but nevertheless, God knew it.

God heard it 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?

No, he said that laughingly in his heart. And Abram said to God, now he's going to speak out loud again, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. But God said, No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a 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. As for Ishmael, I have 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 him a great nation.

[5:41] But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year. Well, when God finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Now, I want you to take first note that this is very clear instruction, isn't it? God is condescending in the way that He is making His will perfectly known to Abraham and to his wife regarding what this covenant promise will entail.

It will entail land that will be in the possession of those who are descendant from Isaac for an eternal promise.

This land will belong to you. I am giving it to you. It also involves an heir. And from this particular heir that will come from Abraham's body and Sarah's body, even at 190 years old respectively, this heir will be the one who will bring forth kings and princes and princesses.

And these people will rule over Israel as well. And it's very interesting that in promising all of this, Abraham's having a hard time with some of it, isn't he?

[7:07] He's wrestling in his own mind. And he thought, I won't say it out loud, but God knew. God knew. One of the beautiful things about what the Scripture does is it never hides from us the raw humanity of living on this earth in temptation to sin, does it?

It doesn't hide the reality. That would be a travesty for us. We could read the Bible and see nothing but successes and think, well, what's wrong with me? Then we read stuff like this and think, you know, I've done that to the Lord before too.

Where I've thought in my mind, I just don't know if the Lord can pull this one off. We can do that.

Now, I want to refer you back to something I said earlier from Psalm 25, 14.

I'm going to put that verse up here on the screen for you. The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him and He will make them know His covenant. Now, we understand fear there is not terror. It isn't the way we normally think about being afraid of someone or something. This is a fear of holiness. This is having a high and holy reverence for God.

[8:15] That's what it means to fear the Lord as His child. We don't have to fear God in the way that unbelievers fear God, those who are left in sin. We are escaping a devil's hell and we have the blessing of God on our life.

And so our fear is a fear born of awe. That's what it means. We are in awe before this holy God. The secret of the Lord refers to His counsel and closeness reserved for those who draw near to Him in this reverent awe, this reverent devotion.

God draws close to them and gives them His counsel for life. Then it goes on to say, the promise of God for sharing in this spiritual intimacy is that God will fellowship with you.

He will make you know the riches of His favor. He will help you to know the goodness of His love for you as His child. Now, this is the spiritual perspective that you and I need to cherish, grow in, and live from.

And that's why I'm sharing this verse with you. Because this verse speaks to the very thing I want to bring to you this morning. You are privileged to know this secret of the Lord.

[9:37] The secret of the Lord is no secret to you. It is the closeness and counsel that God brings to your life because He has put in your heart to know Him.

That is, to know Him through Jesus Christ. To trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins so that you are brought into covenant relationship. Eternal relationship with God Almighty. You and I both know the Scripture says we cannot know God the Father except through faith in God the Son. Is that not true? This is what the Bible says. No one comes to the Father except through me, Jesus said.

And so we need saving faith to believe in Jesus Christ as God's only provision to be made right with Him in our sin. God had to do something with our sin.

The wrong that we live against Him. Well, we have no capacity in ourselves to change that. To heal that. To remedy that. We are sinners.

[10:41] We are headed to a devil's hell because of the wrong that we've done against God. People say, well, Jeff, I think God's okay. Me and God, we're fine. I don't have anything against Him.

He doesn't have anything. Oh, He does have a lot against us. Doesn't He? The Bible says He does. We're born as sinners and we continue to sin. Nobody had to teach you or me how to sin.

If you've ever had a little one and they start coming up and you begin to think, my goodness, what a brat. You know, when you're honest with yourself, right? What a brat.

Well, where'd they get that from? And then there's this echo in the back of your mind. Yeah, He acts just like you, doesn't He? I wonder where He got that from. Both of my boys and my little girl all acted like me.

They didn't act like Suzanne the angel. They acted like me. Jared really did. My youngest boy, some of you know the story that I wanted to name him Jeffrey Jr.

[11:37] And Suzanne said, absolutely not. One Jeff in the house is a plenty for me. Thank you very much. But what she got was a little Jeffrey because he was every bit me in every single way, wasn't He?

He behaved like me. He thought like me. He acted like me. And I just kept telling her, I'm so sorry. If you'd have named him Jeffrey, this wouldn't have happened. We are sinners. And we need a Savior.

If we could save ourselves, Jesus wouldn't have gone to the cross. If you want to know how bad it is in terms of your sin, look at what God had to do to remedy it. He had to send His only Son to the cross to take your sins on Himself, to act as your substitute, to die the death you deserved for your sin.

Standing, hanging, being tortured to death in your place because the penalty of sin is death. And so Jesus in His righteousness, in His sinlessness, took your sin on Himself, hung on the cross to pay the price that you and I deserve for that sin.

He stood in our place to take it Himself so that we wouldn't have to. Now when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, it's as if Jesus lived His perfect life for you so that He could die for your sins as if He lived your sins and you lived His perfection.

[13:03] That's the trade that we get in saving faith. God looks at you as if you lived the perfect sinless life of Jesus and God looks at Jesus in those moments and punishes Him to death in His holy anger as if He had lived the sins you committed.

And you think, that's not fair. No, it's not. It's called grace and mercy. That's what we get in Jesus. It wasn't fair for God at all.

And so sin is very costly, friends. When we talk about covenant, we are talking about what it takes for God to purchase sinners away from sin and death and ruin and hell.

And so these are the most serious matters that any human being could ever consider for their soul and for life on this earth. In the sense of Abraham then, we have Abraham's reverent devotion to God and it means something to him.

And I want to put this up on the screen for you. Abraham's reverent devotion to God means that he will look to God for who God is revealing Himself to be.

[14:16] He says, I am God Almighty. God teaches us to walk in His ways as we learn about and lean into His character.

It's the same way you get to know your spouse. You learn your spouse. You lean into who your spouse is. And over the years, you get to know each other. Suzanne the other day was in the kitchen and I said something from the living room to her and she went, you know, Jeff, it's just getting weirder and weirder about how you say things or I say things that each of us is thinking in the moment and we just beat the other two saying it.

That's what happens when you've been married for 41 years. People say that you start looking like each other. So I'll leave it to you which one's looking more like the other, alright? But this is how you get to know God.

And from God's character, God speaks. He speaks out of who He is to us. And what He speaks is the truth. 100% of the time, He is speaking the truth and He always speaks it to you in love. Always. So, we need to learn to listen. We need to learn to listen to God by learning from His Word. Where does God speak to us?

[15:36] He speaks to us from His Word. He does not speak to us in nebulous, ethereal, kind of ghost-like impressions and voices coming out of the air or in the secret place of our heart.

No. That's all way, way, way too subjective. Because you're going to ask yourself at that point, is that really God? Or what? Because we do have a deceiver that wants to deceive us.

The best way for you to know how God speaks and who God is is to refer to what God has written about Himself and revealed about Himself in the Bible. This is what He wanted. This was His will. And so, we go to the Scriptures to know God. Otherwise, you're left with Jeff standing up here trying to help you understand God from Jeff's opinions and Jeff's perspectives.

And mine are just as subject to error as yours are. So then, who's the authority? This is why we preach the Bible here at Grace. This is the authority.

[16:35] Because this is where God speaks to His people. This is where God reveals Himself to His people. Now, I know many of you know this already. I'm just simply reinforcing what it is that we try to adhere to.

God speaks from His character. Now, what we want to do as we look to God and as we learn about God and lean into God based on who He is revealing Himself to be to us, then we want to do this. This is where we've come from. We want to listen then to God. That is, we want to know and trust His Word. I'm just reviewing where we've come from already in several messages from Genesis 17. So this means that listening to God defines our personhood. I have a whole sermon on that. Listening to God defines our participation. A whole sermon on that.

Today, we're finishing up this attitude of listening to God by talking about God's perspective.

Listening to God defines our perspective. It helps us understand.

[17:37] So, as you see in this outline, what we're talking about here is the way we respond to God. Do you see that? I just put it up there above all that. We're talking about your spiritual responsiveness.

How you and I learn from God's Word to respond to God in the issues of life. So that we're not stuck in circumstances and problems feeling helpless to know what to do.

We don't want to go through life responding to problems. That's a dead end. You don't want to go through life being defined by your struggles. That's a dead end.

You want to learn to go through life responding to life by, first of all, responding to God. You see God as sovereign. You know that none of this stuff that I'm going through right now is outside the purview of what God's designed for me.

And so let me, in this moment of problem, situation, trial, challenge, whatever, doubt, loneliness, anger, fear, whatever it is, worry, let me then turn my eyes heavenward like Psalm 25 said.

[18:38] Let me look to the Lord and trust God in this and let me seek God's perspective. So now I've got you responding to God instead of focused on the problem. This is a much better place for us to live as Christians.

This is where Abraham is being challenged to live in terms of his perspective. He needs to be spiritually responsive to God and what God is revealing to him. Abraham, Abraham, listen to God, listen to what he's telling you and respond in like manner.

Be obedient. Receive it. Walk in that light. Walk in what God's giving you. This is what I mean by spiritual responsiveness. And now you can see how I'll flesh it out with you in each of these. Look at this. So we listen to God as he defines who we are as his child. That's how we respond to God in terms of our personhood. That second one, in terms of participation, we listen and respond to God by participating in his design for us.

This is simply how we talk about being obedient as Christians. What does it look like to obey God? Or did he leave us to guess? Which wouldn't be very kind, would it?

[19:52] No, he's told us. I'm going to say more about that. If you come on Wednesday nights, come this Wednesday night, and I'm going to talk to you a lot about that. Wednesday night, we're going to talk about what it means and what it looks like for us to walk with God in terms of what his word tells us to do.

What does all that mean? How does that work? How does that reflect our love for the Lord? Then finally, we depend on God's word to give and to guide us in the right or the truthful outlook, worldview, or assessment of life's issues.

That's where we are today on that last one. That's what we're going to be talking about. Now, in all of this, what we're going to be dealing with in the way of perspective, this regards our thinking. You see that? This regards our thinking, our reasoning, in relationship to God. Not apart from God, but because we've come to know the Lord.

Because we're Christians, and we're trusting Him for the forgiveness of our sins, we've been made His spiritual child. We've been brought near to the Lord. And so, our thinking and our reasoning is all in relationship to who God is and what He's teaching us.

[21:04] It speaks to what we believe and how we apply the truth to our lives. To how we make meaning of what is happening to us so that we can please God in our responses to His will.

What I'm talking about here helps us be heavenly-minded. It helps us to think about earthly reality in a heavenly way. Because we are, after all, citizens of heaven.

Amen? We are headed to heaven. We are defined by heaven. In God's economy, we are already there in Christ. Because Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, we are seated with Him in the heavenlies.

Amen? That is how in the bank your salvation is. Because Jesus is in heaven and Jesus lives in you, you're already there in God's mind.

It's sealed. The Holy Spirit living in you is God's guarantee that this is so. So, as you demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, this is how you can be assured of your salvation.

[22:11] You see more and more in your life the developing character of Jesus Christ. lived out in who you are. You speak more like Jesus. You think more like Jesus. You do more like Jesus.

And these are the ways that the Holy Spirit is working God's character into your life. To come out. To show what He's made you to be. Again, a little tag for Wednesday night.

We're talking about this very thing on Wednesday night and how it practically applies to the way you live your Christian life. I hope more and more of you will afford yourselves of this discipleship training that we're offering on Wednesday night.

Now, we need these truths from God to correct our misinterpretations due to our sin. Also, due to our ignorance. We just don't know what we don't know.

We can't know everything right away. We have to grow and learn. And that's why we minister to each other. You'll find people in this congregation that are a little further down the road than you are in their walk with God and in their understanding of spiritual things.

[23:14] You want to latch on to those people and learn from them. And then there will be people behind you coming and you can say, hey, I'm going to pass on what I've learned to you and then they pass it on to the...

See how that works? That's the church. This is who we are because of who God is. This is the way it works. We are learning to please God in responses to His will.

spiritual deception is a very real thing. We self-deceive and we're deceived by Satan. And so we need to draw close to God.

We have weakness. There's human weakness in our life. We're not God. We want to think we are sometime and we're not. And life will slap us down and show us, oh yeah? And we are brought back to reality.

Now folks, in Abraham's case, Abraham's spiritual Achilles heel as it were, seems to be his misperceptions about Sarah's place and God's promises to him.

[24:16] This is the reason in Genesis 16, Abraham listened to his wife and went out and had relations with one of their servants, Hagar, and that's how they got Ishmael.

Because Abraham believed God that the boy would come from his own body, his seed as it were, but he didn't believe that his wife could be used of God because she was old and barren and past childbearing anyway.

And so Sarah can't be part of the plan. Well, he was wrong. Sarah was his wife and he should have stuck with his wife. So his Achilles heel seems to be this issue.

But God has not omitted Sarah because Sarah's barrenness was of the Lord. She even said that, didn't she, in Genesis 16, she said, I know I'm barren in my womb and I haven't been able to have kids my whole life and I know that that's from the Lord and that God has a purpose in this.

I don't know what it is. She even said that. But they still tried to get around that in their own way and it was disaster, wasn't it? It was disaster. That's what happens.

[25:23] Abraham's perspective is not allowing for God to use Sarah to fulfill his promises to Abraham. That's got to get corrected. I don't have time to go through it in a big way so I'm just going to mention it.

I was going to turn back but I'm doing some other stuff here with you. In chapter 12 verses 10-20, again, I'm just going to mention it and move on. The issue here was Abraham giving his wife Sarah up to the Egyptian king in secret and telling her don't tell the Egyptian king you're my wife or he'll kill me so that he can have you because you're such a beautiful woman.

He's going to want you when he sees you. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened. And so they all lied about it and God didn't bless the king and it came out this is not his sister as he says in the way that he says this is actually his wife and the king went to Abraham and said, man, dude, what did you do to me?

You've brought all of this calamity down on me from God because you did this. Take your wife back. Here's a bunch of stuff to take with you and get out of here. Right? That's what happened.

Well, my question is why was Abraham so willing to give her up? Fear? Fear? Did it have anything to do with her being barren?

[26:45] I don't know. Was he thinking, well, she's barren anyway. I'll just get another one. Don't we say stuff like that?

I don't know if I married the right person. If you're married, that's the right person. In 15, 2 through 6, God makes it very clear.

Abraham had one plan. Eleazar will be my heir and he'll carry on. And God said, nope, nope. That's not my plan.

The heir that I promised will come from you, Abraham. Not one of your servants. You don't have to pass this off. God's saying to him, nothing's impossible for me.

I've got this. Did Abraham also think that God would use Sarah in this plan since she was his wife? In chapter 16, we understand what I just referenced.

[27:48] Abraham easily accepted his wife's counsel because he'd already reasoned in his heart that her barrenness and her age excluded her from being the mother of his future heir.

That's Abraham's thinking. That's not God's. That's not God's. And then in our chapter, in 17, 15 through 19, we see this continuing tension and contrast between Abraham's lack of perspective and God's good will toward Abraham.

By God telling Abraham now how he's going to use Sarah to do what Abraham thinks is impossible and what does he do? He falls to the ground and he laughs. And then he reasons this deal in his heart.

Here's the thing. Abraham in our text, he thinks that Ishmael is the heir of promise. I'm going to tell you why he thinks that. He voices his understanding of this to God.

What does he say in our text? Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. Right? Oh, that Ishmael might live... What is he telling the Lord after God just told him your heir's going to come from you and Sarah, bro?

[29:02] That's the way it's going to be. It's important for us to understand the human element in this interchange. It's helpful and instructive for us to understand the situation from Abraham's point of view because that's where we live.

Then we'll be blessed with what only God can do for us. Only God can give us His perspective. We don't have any trouble relating to Abraham and going, yeah, you know, I do that too, pretty much. Now, what we need is to come out of that and we need God to give us His perspective. And it is so helpful to look back on another person's context and go, wow, look at that.

The whole time God had that thing in mind? And then later on He told Abraham what He would do and Abraham still struggled with it? Well, how many times have you struggled with what the Bible tells you to do?

When it's written there in plain English, as it were, and in black and white. So, the human element. Abraham is saying, but Lord, here's why he wants Ishmael.

[30:08] And he's not thinking of the future heir coming from him and his wife. He's already got a 13-year-old boy that he had with his servant. Right? So, here's what he's saying.

But Lord, Ishmael is here. He's right in front of me. I thought he would serve you as heir to what you've promised me. So, Abraham is doing what we all do in our walk with God.

We operate with what we see and think to be reasonable. Now, as soon as that comes out of my mouth, you're going to think, but Jeff, wait a minute. Is it wrong for us to live like that?

I mean, after all, aren't we supposed to use common sense? Aren't we supposed to see and reason with our own minds? Is that reasonable to think?

Well, let me ask you. Is this what Abraham is doing? Is he just trying to use common sense? Is he just living according to what is natural and reasonable so that you would say, you know, if I was in Abraham's place, I'd probably do the same thing.

[31:16] I hope not. Because there's something going on here we need to learn. I want you to consider this next question because it is the question.

Is Abraham living by the light he was given from the Lord? That's the question. I could care less what Abraham thinks at this moment. What I want him to tell me is what did God tell you?

What has God said to you and revealed to you so that you need to respond in obedience? That's the issue. Not what you think. You get people all the time come in and want to tell you what they think.

And I'm like, what does God say? Now tell me, where are you with what God has said? Are you obeying? Do you not? You know what?

I know. I read that verse and I want to apply that verse but pastor, I don't really think I understand how. Well, let's sit down together and let's talk that baby through, man. Let's help you get some wisdom here from the Lord because that perspective is going to take you through whatever it is that you're facing.

[32:18] What you need is what God has said. His wisdom needs to reign in the moment. Not what you think because what you think could be wrong. Even though you're sincere, you could be sincerely wrong.

This is Abraham. Oh, that Ishmael might live before you, Lord. He's here. I can see him. He's 13 years. For 13 years, I've invested in him thinking this way.

The Lord says, Nope. Nope. That's not the plan. I thought all along that this would be the plan.

No. Now, here's the question. Where did Abraham get the idea that Ishmael would serve as God's fulfillment to his promise of an heir?

Did he get it from God? Has God ever said Ishmael will be the heir? He'll be the one I bring all the promise through. He has never said that.

[33:18] God's never said that. So, where did Abraham get this idea? See? We have to deal with that in the text. That's what this passage is telling us.

This is the reason God's dealing with it. Alright, now think about this. Let's extrapolate a little bit. Let me ask you, friends, who is this being written for? Who's the original immediate audience that's hearing this from Moses?

The Israelites. This was written back in the time when all of Israel was sitting on one side of the Jordan River getting ready to obey God to go across the Jordan River and invade the promised land and take it for themselves.

Because God said, I'm going to give it to you and all of you are going to be my instrument of judgment against all these people who are worshiping false gods and doing wicked, wicked things. So, you're going to go over and you're going to take care of that and that's going to be my judgment on them because they won't listen and they won't change and then I'm going to give all of this to you and it'll belong to you forever. Way back, thousands of years ago.

[34:21] And so, Moses is writing this and giving this to the children of Israel to show them their heritage and to give them a record of how they're to live in relationship to God. So, now think about this.

Where did Israel get some of their ideas like these? Having a king for themselves. God said, I'm your king.

And they said, no, we want to have a king like the nations. We want to be like the nations. Where'd they get that? That's not something God told them. What about imitating the pagan nations around them and the priorities of their life and how they adopted lifestyle things?

They didn't get that from God. God told them, don't do that. What about making for themselves images to worship and to pray to? Did God tell them to do that? He told them the exact opposite. Don't do that. That will greatly offend me, the Lord said. What about throwing their children into blazing fires as sacrifices to appease foreign gods? That's what the pagans in that land were doing and that's why they're coming under judgment from God.

[35:27] Can you imagine? Taking your child and throwing your child alive into a fire to sacrifice to a false god so you can have a better life.

So you can go on living and the gods will prosper you at the forfeiture of the life of your own child. This is where we can get.

This is how far we can go in our deception and in our sin. What about marrying unbelievers? God said, don't do that. Don't go over there and marry their people because they'll influence you in their ways and take you away from me.

And what happened? That's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened. So did God direct Israel to do these kinds of things?

No, He did not. And yet they did them. Now, what about us? Where do we get ideas like this?

[36:30] God doesn't want me to suffer this much. There's got to be an out here somewhere. This can't be right. God wants me to be happy and financially independent.

Oh really? Where's that written? My sin is my own business. Preacher. My life is my own to live. My will is free to choose and do as I see best. Do you understand every one of those statements negates that? Every one of those statements says, I don't need this.

I don't need Him. And I don't need what He's done. I can be my own God. I can make up my own mind. I can live my life the way I want to live it. That's not the Christian life. Jesus said, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.

That's the price. He said, count the cost before you come to Me. Where'd we get the idea church is optional? If I don't have anything else to do on Sunday and nothing else is more important, we'll see.

[37:44] How about this one? The more that Christians can identify with the world by looking like the world and acting like the world, the more the world will listen to us and take us seriously.

Oh, really? Do you know that there are many, many churches that base everything they do on Sunday on that very premise? Is that not right, Brother Greg? And this is what Greg and I want to guard against.

And do you know the very first thing that we guard against with that one right there? This church being about Jeff and Greg. This church is not built on a personality.

It's built on a person and that person is Jesus. Now, does the church reflect the personality of Greg and Jeff? Yes. Because the Bible also says you'll become like your teachers.

And so there is a certain personality to our church and much of that personality is reflected by the personalities of your leadership. But hopefully, what you see in your leadership is follow us as we follow Jesus and that we're constantly pointing you to Jesus.

[38:50] If you like what you see in Jeff, give Jesus the glory because Jesus is who's doing it in Jeff, right? Isn't this what you want to see people see in you? So that you can say to people, the difference you see in me is spelled J-E-S-U-S.

That's your witness. That's your testimony. The life that you see me living and the priority that you see me living is because I love Christ because Christ first loved me. Now you're in a position to talk to them about Jesus.

To share the hope and the love of Jesus. We don't build this ministry on a human being. And we certainly don't build this ministry on trying to look and sound like the people that we're trying to reach for Christ.

We don't have to look like them and sound like them and adopt their priorities. We don't have to adopt their music. We don't have to adopt their lyrics and then Christianize them.

We don't have to adopt their wisdom to give to each other and then throw a Bible verse on top of it as if that's going to help. We don't have to do anything like that. God has given us the wisdom that we need to worship Him.

[40:03] When we sang the songs that we did this morning, you notice those songs didn't have anything to do with what the world is. It was exactly the opposite. We sang those songs to God's glory, not to theirs.

There's nobody up here doing guitar riffs. You know, this is not a performance. You are the choir and we give you songs to sing that will honor the Lord Jesus Christ so that you can offer Jesus the glory of your worship.

You sing to Jesus every single Sunday, not to men or the concepts of men. You see, I camp out on that one. I'm a little bit passionate about that one.

Listen, I've gone through five ministries previous to this one and I've seen the damage that one's done and the poison it's done to families, the breakup of marriages, the bust up of churches.

No church can sustain that. The wisdom of man will bring it to ruin. And so we look to God. How about that last one? There is good in all people and in all religions.

[41:12] That is not what the Bible says. It really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love God, love others, and you're sincere. And that is not true.

That is not what the Bible says. It's very popular. So is it important for us to understand where Abraham is coming from in this passage?

Yes, it is. It's even more important, though, that we understand where God's coming from and what God's perspective is on all of this because it's very easy to be misguided.

So what's most important about this isn't what Abraham sees and perceives. It's what God sees, says, and perceives. That's always the case when we go to Scripture. So here is the issue for us to consider at this point.

Are Abraham's understandings and perceptions concerning Sarah and Ishmael based on what God has said? Well, look at what God has said in verses 15 and 16.

[42:14] Revisit this with me. Then God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife... Now remember, this is all coming under what verse 9 says. Now as for you...

God's giving him His direction for His part in the covenant, the relationship with God. Now as for you... Then God said to Abraham, As for your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah will be her name.

I'm going to bless her, Abraham. Indeed, I will, I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations.

Kings of peoples will come from her. Now look again at Abraham's response in verses 17 and 18. Abraham fell on his face and laughed.

Then he said secretly in his heart, Will a child be born to a man 100 years old? Are you kidding me? Will Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? Then Abraham spoke to God, Oh God, that Ishmael might live before you.

[43:25] Hmm. Now who is in need of a change of perspective in this text? Abraham. Now the question then is, where will Abraham get this change in perspective?

How should Abraham respond to God shaping and defining Abraham's perspective? And the answer is very straightforward in obedience, in faith.

He hears what God has said, no matter what his senses tell him. We live so much by feelings and that gets us in trouble. This is not about what Abraham feels, it's about what God has promised. What has God said? Sarah is going to have your baby this time next year. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. I don't think so.

But he won't tell God that. He won't tell God that. So this word from God is driving directly into Abraham's way of thinking about his wife, his future, and more importantly about his relationship with his God.

[44:31] You know, people say, Jeff, the last thing preachers ought to be doing is taking people where they're struggling and poke it. No, that's exactly what we need to do. We find out where you're struggling and we poke it.

Why do we do that? Because that's where you need the wisdom. Why would I avoid that as your pastor? What good does that do you? For me to be a coward and not love you enough to tell you the truth and bring God's light to it?

You say, well, Jeff, that might make me mad. Well, then that's your issue. You can get mad if you want to. But what we need to do is speak the truth to you in love and encourage you to obey the Lord because we don't want to see you captive to satanic deception and we don't want to see you waste your life.

You don't know if you'll live tomorrow. Tomorrow may be the day God brings you to give an account. You don't know and I don't know. This is why I preach like this. I told you, I preach like it fell out of heaven at my feet and I preach like I'll never get to do it again.

Because I might not. Shoot, I might not even finish this one. You may see me go and drop out right here. But don't be sad. Say, He's with the Lord now.

[45:46] We don't know. All of this needs to be brought under the purview of what God is teaching. God's truth is teaching, reproving, correcting, and training the man of God, Abraham, in righteous living that he might be adequate, equipped for every good work.

That's direct quote from 2 Timothy 3.16. God is giving Abraham an invaluable gift. It's the gift of God's perspective on the way things really are.

That's why we minister the truth to each other. Because I need it and you need God's perspective on your life. And if there's a certain area of your life where you're struggling, we need to come in and support you.

We need to come alongside of you and lovingly bear that with you and help you bring to bear the truth of God on this so that you honor the Lord. You don't waste the suffering.

Don't waste your suffering. Let God be in charge of it. This is a rare gift that God gives to us so willingly, so freely. So look, if there are any two people in Abraham's life who he desperately needs God's perspective on, it's Sarah and Ishmael.

[47:01] Right? He needs God to tell him, no, you need to get your attitude right about your wife. Okay? And to do that, you've got to get your attitude right toward me. Nothing is impossible for me, Abraham.

If I want to open her womb at 90 years old and bring you guys together so you can have a baby, that's not an issue for me. Dude, I made the universe. Okay? I made the universe.

Nothing is impossible for me. All right? I'll put this up here. Abraham's perspective is causing him to relate to his wife and his son in ways which are not defined and guided by God's relationship to him and to them.

To them! And so here's where we see being, doing, thinking, and coming together in Abraham's relationship with the Lord. Being, doing, thinking, all coming together.

Here's where we see our need to have our perspective on life defined by what God has actually said about himself and about his relationship to us. Folks, look at that statement.

[48:03] God will always make the best choice for you, so trust him. Trust him. And don't go by your feeling. You say, Jeff, it's not feeling like he's making the best choice for me.

Well, this is why I put that thing up there. We tell ourselves, I'm not supposed to suffer this much.

Oh, really? And then we realize, who are we following? How much did he suffer?

Peter told us, don't consider this suffering as wasted. It's not wasted in God's economy. It all counts.

That's the way God is. So, I listen to God as he shapes and defines my perspective about who he is, who I am, and how I am to live according to these definitions of himself in relationship to me.

Listen, friends, please listen. Just because you hold to some perspective in your mind doesn't make it true. Just because you're thinking it, just because it's valuable to you doesn't necessarily mean it's true, right?

Can I give you one example from history that all of us can relate to? Hitler believed he was right.

Every despot who's ever come down the pike really believed they were right.

[49:26] They were cleansing the world. Now, is that scary? Have you ever done something you were convinced was right, only get further down the road and look back and go, oh, whoa.

That's why I'm glad I grow, you know. I look back on my youth particularly and I think, man, can we just erase the first 30 years of my life kind of thing?

God's truth is the way things really are. This is what you trust. I don't even trust my own heart. Not the way I choose to see things.

That's not what I trust. God's truth is communicated to us through the Bible. That's His perspective.

That's not misconception. Now, it's interesting how Abraham is living with this current reality of Sarah's barrenness and Ishmael being his son.

I think it's interesting. His perspective is based on two things. Now, get this. His perspective is based on what he can't do and on what he has done.

[50:34] That's so interesting to me. That just hits me right between the eyes. Jeff, how often are you thinking about ministry and marriage and whatever based on what you can't do and what you have done in the way of a track record?

Well, I pulled that off before. Or, well, I can't do this, but. Look, Abraham cannot make his wife conceive. Decades of physical intimacy with Sarah have proven that to him.

He has a track record. Yeah, I can't do that. It's not going to happen. but he thinks back and thinks, I have been able to produce a son from my own body, just not according to God's will or plan, according to what God is saying to me now.

That was never his plan. So, Abraham has manufactured a perspective on his wife and on Ishmael. He's manufactured this plan based on that perspective, neither of which are based on what God is actually said.

Now, is that dangerous? And yet, he's convinced. This is the father of the Jewish nation. Now, if this can happen to him and the Apostle Paul, what about this old boy?

[51:54] Boy, I tell you, see, you understand that when I work on this stuff, this stuff hits me before it hits you. I've got to deal with this all week. You've just got to listen for an hour. God's had me squirming under this all week long.

So, here's the question. How important is it that we live by what God has said in his covenant relationship with us? Well, here's the facts given to Abraham by God.

You just run through them with me. Look at this. Sarah is my choice for the mother of the child, I promised you. She will be a mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her.

By my doing. Look at this one. I am God Almighty. So, I am God Almighty is changing her name to Sarah because it means princess. Her name reflects the royal line.

David, Solomon, Jesus will come from her. The ultimate king, Jesus Christ, will be born from this blood line. Isaac is my choice, not Ishmael, of what you will call your son born from Sarah.

[53:03] His name means laughter. Who laughed? Sarah and Abraham both laughed. Isn't that funny? No pun intended.

I think it's funny. It's like God saying, you don't think I know you laughed? Remember when Abraham said, you laughed, Sarah, and she said, oh, I didn't laugh. Oh, yeah, you did laugh. Me and God both heard you. Well, God heard Abraham. I am God Almighty chooses Isaac to make my covenant. with. And then, notice this, as for Ishmael, I am God Almighty, and I am God Almighty does not choose to establish my covenant with him.

Ishmael means God hears. Ishmael means God hears. And so, God says, I've heard you in what you've asked of me concerning Ishmael, so I'm going to bless him, I'm going to make him fruitful, and I'm going to make him the father of twelve princes and a great nation.

And so, what you see here in the scripture is clearly delineated, from Abraham and Isaac come the Jewish nation, the people of promise. From over here, you have twelve princes coming from Ishmael, which represent the Arab nations.

[54:14] This is the way God is delineating. I'm not making this up, I'm not reaching, I'm not making political statements, I'm telling you what the Bible says. And God says, I've heard you about Ishmael, and I'm going to make a whole bunch of them and I'm going to bless them, and sure enough.

And I've also made up my mind about Isaac, and Isaac is where the greatest king of kings is going to come from, Jesus. I'm going to preserve this bloodline through you and Jesus is going to come from these people.

So I'm keeping my promise to you. If you look at verse 21 with me, but my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.

Wow. This is what God has said. And then in verse 22, when he finished talking with Abraham, he went up from him. Now, this is another way that the Bible says this.

This is all that needs to be said. Abraham has everything he needs in the way of information, truth, and perspective to follow God and be faithful in his relationship with the Lord.

[55:24] And so this is the deal with us. Look, folks, we must live by faith in who God is and in what God has said. Anything that serves to weaken, confuse, or undermine your faith and understanding in God's Word, flee from it.

If you see some wisdom out there that conflicts with the Bible, go with the Bible. If your own mind conflicts with what you read in the Word, go with the Word. This is trustworthy.

Abraham knew all this. He knew all of this was going on. His perspectives on these things led him to act either in godly or ungodly ways. So we can say that when Abraham looked to himself in these things, he felt small, afraid, and weak, so that this perspective hurt his walk with God.

Whenever we put that focus on ourselves, that's what happens. Life can make us feel small, fearful, and weak. So don't focus on that. Without God's perspective on things, apart from the truth and faith, we're going to try to deny or diminish what we know is true about us, that we're small, we're weak, we're insignificant in ourselves, and so we need to look and listen beyond ourselves, don't we?

We need to go outside of ourselves. We have a God to worship, and it's not me. I don't look in the mirror and see God. I see a pretender. And so I run to God and say, God, help me.

[56:54] Help me in my weakness. Help me in my lack of faith, God. Please help me. And that's where we want to live, isn't it? Look, God's truth and perspective lead me away from myself and to Jesus Christ.

And look at the blessings that I have in the Lord Jesus Christ. He makes me strong where I'm weak. He gives me peace where I'm afraid. He makes me worthy where I'm insignificant.

He cleanses me where I'm filthy. And He fills me with hope where I was hopeless. He gives me grace, His favor, for forgiveness of my sins where I deserve wrath and judgment.

Alright, this is God's perspective on Jeff. In Christ, this is how God sees me. I'm His child. I'm going to go with God every time.

every time. So why is it important for me to have God's perspective on all of life? Well, think about where we end up if we base our perspective on anything but God.

[58:01] Looking to yourself. These are your choices. You look to yourself. You look to others. You look to the world out there. All of those are ways that we suppress the truth.

Not heed it. Not listen to it in the Lord. Alright? Suppressing that truth with other ideas so that I deny myself from truly knowing God's designs for me in any given situation.

What that does is it further distorts my perspective about God, myself, and my world. It's a deceptive cycle of misperception. Alright? Look at this.

I am a dead end. Contrast that with I am God Almighty. Now you choose. Where do you want to live? Do you want to live as I am or do you want to worship the true I am?

It's up to you. I want to give you a quick illustration as I move to a close. Listen to this. Don't tune out on me. A quick illustration. You have a camera.

[59:08] And through this camera you can record your particular view on life in any given subject or situation that you're facing in your life.

Whatever it is. Marriage, work, trying to make a decision about something, moving through a difficulty in your life, dealing with worry, anxiety, problems in your relationships, whatever it is that you're facing.

You have a camera that you can record your particular view and response in life. Okay? So what you do is you have an assortment of lenses for your camera that provide you with different perspectives on the world.

These are lenses which you use to shade things, widen things, color things, and deliberately distort the image if that's what you want to do.

The lens you choose to use takes pictures of life then corresponding to how you want to see things. How you want to see your marriage.

[60:14] How you want to see God. How you want to see parenting. How you want to see work. How you want to see the priorities of life. Not according to the way things really are.

Your lenses change the perspective according to what you want the lens to do. So the picture are your perspectives on what you see based on the lens you choose.

So the lenses are labeled according to your interests in any given situation to what you think is important. According to your biases related to life.

Let me give you an example. You put on the lens of self. Click. And the lens of self does this for you. All the pictures have you at the center.

Each picture draws the eye to you. And so you put that lens on and you take snapshots of life because that's the way you want to see it. With you in the middle.

[61:17] You as most important. You take that one off and you put on the lens of worldly wisdom. And worldly wisdom apart from God's wisdom highlights the customs and the fads and the philosophies and the psychologies of what mankind says is important.

How mankind defines the priorities of life and how mankind tells you to navigate the issues of life. That's what that lens does. It lets you see life from the world's point of view.

Then you take that one off and you put on the lens of false religion. Many people do this. And so they see the world and their life in situations through the lenses of Mormonism or Islam.

What we understand to be false religions because those religions don't exalt Jesus Christ as the only way for the forgiveness of sins. You take that one off and you put on a lens that is very popular to humanity and little talked about.

It's the lens of idols. And so now you come up and you take pictures with the idol lens on. What does the idol lens do? Well, the idol lens helps you focus on stuff and make the stuff of life the priority for you.

[62:32] Ideas that are your pet ideas. People in your life. Everything is seen in relationship to what you treasure most. What you treasure most.

Click. And then finally, you take that one off and you put on the lens of besetting sin. And what this lens does is it brings to the fore your pride, your lust, your gossip, your greed, your laziness, your gluttony, etc.

etc. Each lens distorts perspective in a unique way, but make no mistake, they each distort reality. And that's the point. but you do have an alternative. In Christ Jesus, you have truth. So as I discipline myself to listen to God by reading His Word, and as I grow to understand more of what God has said by taking His Word into my heart, I'm conditioning my mind to think about things the way God does.

And that's where I want to be. I want to be thinking about Jeff first with God's perspective in mind. I start with me. I don't start with Suzanne. I don't start with you.

[63:53] Suzanne and you guys are not the problem for Jeff. Jeff's the problem for Jeff. I need God's perspective on Jeff. I need to get my own perspective on myself, heavenly and godly.

And then I move out leaning into God's character to minister to you, to be a friend to you, a pastor to you, to speak the truth and love to you. I don't want to do that under Jeff's lenses.

I don't want you to suffer like that. If I make a mistake trying to minister the gospel to you, it's really easy for me to circle back around and ask for your forgiveness and get it right.

But if I mess up because I'm getting in my own way, it's a lot harder for me to come and say, man, oh man, that was all about my pride there. I was just being prideful.

Will you forgive me? Now, I've had to do that. But I'd much rather do the other. I'm just tripping over myself trying to help you in the Lord Jesus and I just don't know everything.

[64:55] Please forgive me and let's take another run at that. That's a lot different, isn't it? Remember I told you, if you're going to fall in sin, if you're going to be tripped up in sin, trip up falling toward Jesus because you're pursuing Him so hard, you fall in that direction.

And then get up and keep going. Don't turn around and run the other way. That's a whole different kind of tripping. Where do all these lenses come from through which I'm able to interpret my world God's way?

They come from God's Word. And that's the point, isn't it? That's the point. And so, brothers and sisters, I commend the truth of the Word of God to you from a loving God who loved you enough to give you His Son in your place to free you from these sinful, deceptive perspectives that will cause you to waste your life.

And you can waste it in a heartbeat, can't you? You don't think I look back on pictures and see this young guy? And I look now and I go, what happened?

64 years happened. Like that. Don't, don't, don't stall. Don't deny. You don't know if you'll be here tomorrow. Join me in prayer, please.

[66:15] Father God, we look into the life of your servant Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17 and we're grateful that your servant Moses was guided by the Holy Spirit to write these things down and challenge us.

Lord, we need to hear the truth. We need to hear your perspective. We need to take it into our hearts and carefully consider where our life is headed, where our life has been.

What is the most important thing to me in my life? What has been the most important thing to me in my life? And could it ever be that Jesus could be that person? Could it really be that I could come to the place in my life where Jesus Christ is the most important person in my life?

Where everything that I'm doing and all the decisions I'm making are coming through Him and from Him because I'm leaning so much into Him to know Him as my Savior and my King and my Lord?

Well, Father, we know the answer to that is yes. Of course. And so, God, I pray that You will beckon Your people to You and bring them near to Your heart and help them to walk in Your love.

[67:19] Help us to adopt the Word of God as that Word that leads us in life as we relate to each other. Help us to take up our cross, denying ourselves, and follow You in the way that You have prescribed to be followed.

Help us to trust You that You will always make the highest and best choices for us because You're wise and You're loving and You're kind. We thank You for Your Word and most of all we thank You, Father, for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

In His name we pray. Amen.