



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 5

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"We've been studying the life of Abraham. We might say that we've been in this school of faith. In school, you learn the principles, you learn the theories. We might say that the final exam was Genesis 22, when Abraham offered Isaac. That was kind of like his final exam and he passed. But then once he graduates, then he goes on to real life, living by faith. It's just like when you go to college. You learn the principles and you learn the theories. But when you graduate, that's not the end. Commencement is actually the beginning. And you step out into real life, and you begin to apply those principles and theories, and sometimes you find out, that even though you understand the big picture, you understand the principles and the theories, specifically understanding how they work out in real life is more difficult. You find some stuff where you say, we didn't learn this in college and you can't really learn it until you're just out there doing it.

I think the same thing is true in the school of faith. We've talked about the big theology, and we've talked about what it means, and we've seen how it's fleshed out in the life of Abraham, but sometimes when it comes to just daily walking by faith, there are still those questions that we struggle with. We struggle with what does it mean on a practical level to be a person of faith? For example, sometimes we struggle with, does it mean if I'm a person of faith that I step out? Is that faith, or does it mean sometimes if I have faith, that I wait patiently for God? When do I step out? When do I wait? Or sometimes we struggle with, if I'm a person of faith, you know what part of this is God's part and what part of this is my part? You know, do I do something, does God do something? And trying to find that fine line between what we would call faith and presumption. You know, when do I just step out by faith, and trust God's going to do something, and when am I just presuming upon God, and hoping he just kind of comes along and bails me out? Those are real life questions that we struggle with, when we really try to apply the lessons of faith and they're not new. There are things that Abraham struggled with thousands of years ago.

After he passed his final exam, he had one thing left to do, really, that was a big issue of faith, and that is, he needed to find a bride for Isaac. Abraham believed the promise of God, and that through Isaac the Promise Seed, he would have all these descendants, as many as the stars in the sky. And for that to happen, Isaac had to have a wife. And he knew that Isaac couldn't have a wife from among the Canaanites, because God wanted to call out this unique people out of the descendants of Abraham. So, the wife would have to come from Abraham's people, which were about 500 miles back to where Abraham came from. So, then you come to this question, what does it mean for Abraham to be a person of faith, and to arrange a wife for Isaac? Now I suppose you could say, if Abraham really had faith, he should have just trusted God, and Isaac could have dated a nice girl. But in that culture, that wasn't how it worked. It was the responsibility of the father to make arrangements for his son's wife. And so that's Abraham's responsibility.

Now, one way of looking at this faith thing is, they could have just all gathered in Abraham's tent every evening, and had a prayer meeting, and ask God to magically provide a wife, that just happened to be traveling 500 miles across the desert and through camp one day, and there she is. And I suppose God could do that. The other thing Abraham could have done is, just decided, let's get Isaac, let's go back to the homeland, let's find a nice girl, and they can date and get married, and we'll all move back. But maybe there's a solution that's kind of in the middle of these things. One is, kind of, Abraham just taking charge, and one is just doing nothing, and trusting God to do something. Maybe there's kind of some middle ground that helps us understand very practically, what it means to be a person of faith.

So if you have a Bible, turn to Genesis 24. Genesis 24 is the love story, and it's the longest chapter in the book of Genesis. But in the process of reading these verses, we're going to kind of read them like scenes in a play, and just take one scene at a time. I want you to specifically look for the combination of what Abraham and his servant understood was their part in all of this. And what they also understood was God's part. And you have really, a beautiful picture of how God in His sovereignty does His work. But it's combined with us and our choices, doing our part, coming together to accomplish His plan.

"Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. 2 Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, 4 but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac." 5 The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" 6 Then Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there! 7 The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter."

I would say that's the opening scene of the story and it really sets the story. Abraham is looking for a wife for Isaac, and he understands that she cannot come from the Canaanites. She must come from his descendants, which are four to 500 miles back to where he came from, in Ur of the Chaldeans. So he brings forth his servant and he asked him to take an oath, and that was just the typical way of doing that. The hand under the thigh and would take this oath.

But in the process, the servant asked what I would consider to be a very logical question. What if I travel 500 miles and she won't come? I mean stop and think about what the servant is asking of this teenage girl. He's asking her to leave her family - she would never see them again - travel 500 miles across the desert to marry a man she had never met. That's a tall order. And so, the servant is saying, okay, I'm imagining myself entering into this little discussion and what if she just won't go? Well, can I come and get Isaac, you know, and take Isaac all the way back, and she can meet Isaac, and we can work something out? And Abraham responds pretty emphatically to that, that he doesn't want Isaac to leave the land.

Now there's a couple of things that are going on in this opening scene, that I think help us understand what the theology of this whole chapter is really all about. In verse seven, Abraham makes it very clear that he understands God's promise, that he understands he was called out of that land, he understands what God is doing with him, he understands who Isaac is, is the Promise Seed, in that Isaac will then through his descendants, eventually he will become a great nation. He really understands all of this. So because of that, he understands that this is a great step of faith that's in alignment with God's plan and

purpose. So he tells the servant, you know, you go and we'll just trust God. When you get there, God will do whatever God has to do, in order to work it out, so that you will come home with a bride for Isaac. Which gives us I think, a very helpful principle, when we think about walking by faith, and that is, when we think about this walk of faith and taking steps of faith, the first question we always need to ask ourselves, is this in alignment with God's plan and purpose? Because oftentimes, we can get the impression that this faith walk is really about us. It's about making my life more comfortable. It's about getting things that I want. It's about accumulating health and wealth and prosperity, and faith can really be all about us. And we need to understand God won't be responsive to that at all, because that's not the walk of faith.

The walk of faith is about God and God's plan, God's purpose, and what God's doing in the world. So, when I'm contemplating a step of faith and I'm wondering, is this really what God wants me to do, one of the very practical questions I process is why? Why do I want to know that? Is this about me or is this about God, is this about my comfort, or is this about His kingdom? Is this really in alignment with what God is doing in the world? And that's the first thing I really have to process. And that's exactly what Abraham did.

Along the way, he also was exercising his good judgment as it related to his son Isaac. I think Abraham did not want Isaac to go back to the homeland, because he was concerned that if Isaac left this tent existence in the desert and went back and really experienced a much more comfortable lifestyle among his relatives, that there was a chance maybe he wouldn't go back to the desert. Now, in one sense, I guess you could say that was the lack of faith, because God would have somehow done something to get Isaac back where he needed to be, in order to fulfill his promise to Abraham. But what Abraham was thinking, is why even tempt his son in that way? He was exercising, what I would consider to be, just wise fatherly judgment, saying, I don't want my son tempted with that. This is the life he's known, and he needs to stay in the land, and God's going to keep his promise. And so he makes it very clear to the servant: Don't, don't take him back there. God will do His thing and you'll come back with a wife.

I think the other thing that you see in this particular text is the combination of both our part and God's part. Abraham understood there was something he could do. He could have this slave go back and the slave could do what he could do, but there was also a part that only God could do, and God would have to orchestrate things in order to accomplish. So it's a combination of God doing something, Abraham doing something, to accomplish the purpose.

Okay, with that, we pick up the story. Verse 10. "Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 He said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master."

[And it came about]15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a

little water from your jar.” 18 She said, “Drink, my lord”; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19 Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking.” 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21 Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not.

[Then it came about]22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, 23 and said, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father’s house?” 24 She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” 25 Again she said to him, “We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in.” 26 Then the man bowed low and worshiped the Lord. 27 He said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master’s brothers.”

That would be the end of Scene 2. The servant travels, about 30-day journey, and ends up in the place where he needs to be, and he comes up with this plan. He lands outside of the city by the well, because he knows the daughters will be coming out to the well in the evening to get water. And that's his best chance to look over the field, but he also understands, how will I know which one is the one that God wants to marry Isaac? So he prays. It's worth noting that the prayer in verses 12, 13, and 14 is the first recorded prayer in the book of Genesis. You could say that the discussion between Abraham and God over the city of Sodom was the first prayer, but in the classic sense that we would think of it, this is the first recorded prayer. And it's the servant basically saying, I've done my part, but now I need you to do your part. Only you God, can tell me which one of these girls is the one for Isaac.

So he comes up with a plan. Now I have to say, we need to be careful about these kinds of plans in our walk of faith. Typically, we don't recommend that you put God in a box and say, God, if you do a, b, and c, then I'll know that this is your will. But in this particular case, I think there's a reason for it, and God honors that. The plan is, as these girls come out, then I will ask for a drink. And when she offers me a drink and says, I will also water your camels, then that's the one. Now we might think, well that seems rather ordinary, but it really wasn't for a camel that has traveled the distance that those camels have traveled. One camel was capable of drinking between 20 and 40 gallons of water. So, he's got 10 camels, so do the math. You're talking about 200 to 400 gallons of water. So, this isn't a case where this woman is saying, you know, I'll pour a little water in the trough and there you go little camel. This is the case of with probably a one to two-gallon container, she's going to fill about 200 to 400 gallons of water. So, you're talking about hours of labor. So, this would be very unusual that she would offer this man some water, and say, oh, by the way, I'll spend the rest of my evening watering your camels. So, it was quite unusual.

And so, he's just getting this prayer out of his mouth. And up comes Rebekah, and she's very beautiful, and he asked for a drink, and she offers to water the camels. Then he's thinking, this could be it. So, he enters into this discussion, and sure enough, she's a descendant of Abraham, and he falls on his face and he worships God, because clearly God has fulfilled His part of the deal. God has been faithful, this is the one. But of course, the challenge is just beginning. He has to convince Rebekah and Rebekah’s family that she needs to go 500 miles away, and marry this person they've never met. So the story continues.

Arnie: So, Bryan help me understand, we see God walking with this servant that He loves, answering his prayers on the spot. Why in the world won't He do the same for me?

Bryan: Yeah, that's a good question. He doesn't do it for me either. But the reality is, in history, He doesn't do it for most. I mean it's kind of one of these remarkable miracle moments. When you think about it, there's miracles all the way through the Bible, and they're not intended to be the norm for the Christian life. There are miraculous moments, but I also think, you know, think how much more we have than what they had. We have the fulfillment of the promise. We have principles, we have scripture, we have commands, we have the Holy Spirit within us, so we do have a lot, but it doesn't happen quite the way it happened in this story.

Cara: No, I think we struggle too, or at least I do, with what part is God's, and what part is ours? So sometimes it's hard to go, do I move out in faith here, or do I hold up and wait on God? I think that's really challenging to discern those, Bryan. So do you have any points that can help me figure out, when I'm supposed to be moving and when I'm supposed to be staying?

Bryan: Sure. Let me-three points. One, two, three, here you go. (Laughing) It's a great question. It's always going to require faith. So there's always an element of that. It's just never going to be as simple and black and white as people want it. But here's some practical things to think about. One is, there is what we refer to as the known will or revealed will of God. So some examples, Ephesians 5, it's God's will that we be filled with the Spirit. First Thessalonians 4, it's God's will that we be sexually pure. First Thessalonians 5, it's God's will that we be thankful. So you add into that God's commands, and you might say that's part of His will as well. It starts with, am I already being obedient to what I know is His will, before I'm asking for more?

Cara: So not putting myself in there, like what I deep down really want the answer to be?

Bryan: Well, I think if I'm not obedient to what He's already told me, why would He tell me more? [Right.] So I start there and that's super practical. It's real black and white. Second is, I think really wrestling with, am I pursuing God's will or am I just looking for insider information to help me with my will? So, it's like, am I honestly in my heart saying, God, what do you want? Because I think so, then God will get you there. It might be a little zig-zaggy, but God will get you there. But a lot of people, they're asking that question for insider information, to benefit them in some way.

And then the third is, I think it's driven by principles. So it's back to what has God said? And we seek to live consistently with those principles. And then I think you step out, and you listen, and if your heart is right, God has His way of steering you to where He wants you.

Cara: And one thing I noticed about your teaching, is that Abraham sent his slave, so he must've had good faith in his slave.

Bryan: A lot of trust.

Cara: Yeah. A lot of trust there.

Bryan: Plus he was tired.

Cara: Yeah. And so to me, it just got me really pondering, how much I love other believers, and how much we need each other. And if they're in God's will, you're in God's will, you guys, we can trust each other to help each other out.

Bryan: Yeah. That's significant trust, to trust a slave to pick up a wife for your son. [Yeah.] [Wow.]

Arnie: It also was pretty cool to me, to see way back when, they had helicopter parents, because Abraham wanted to keep Isaac out of Ur, and did everything he could. And as a father, I can relate to this. You want the best for your kids or your grandkids. You want to shield your kids from potential temptation.

Bryan: Yeah. I mean, I think all of us as parents, that it makes sense to us. And maybe part of it was Abraham left the land a couple of times, and it was disastrous both times. So maybe he's reading his story into this a little bit, but I think his decision's reasonable. There's no reason to tempt your child unnecessarily. You know, life is hard in Canaan. It's pretty good back home, and the possibility Isaac thinking, I think I'm just going to stay. I think it was real. But I think as parents, we wrestle with, yes, my job is to protect my children, but it's also to prepare my children. And if I don't prepare them, then they are going to get beat up and messed up when they get out from under my umbrella. So it's figuring out when do I do this? How do I do this? How do I let them make their mistakes? I want a lot of that while they're under my roof, so I can help, not after they leave home.

Cara: So, Abraham's servant devises this plan. The basic prayer is that, God, if you do this, and it tells me to do that, then I know it's the right thing. So it's basically putting God in a box, which I've been guilty of. Is it ever right for us to pray that way though?

Bryan: Yeah, that's a very good question. I would say for sure, it's not normal, and it's very risky to kind of put out A, B, and C, and if God responds accordingly, that's His will, because the enemy hears that, and it's an easy way to get deceived. So we're always, if my house sells, if this happens, if that happens, it's like, how do you know that's God directing you? I think sometimes God responds in spite of our methods, because our heart is right, and He loves us, but I think generally speaking, our decisions need to be driven by principles and prayer, and not by putting out these, God, if you do this. Yes, kind of the walk of sight. If I leave today, and my left rear tire's flat, and that's a sign, you don't want me to come back again. And it's like, that's probably not a good way to live our Christian lives.

Cara: And did I hear you right? That was the first recorded prayer.

Bryan: I think that it is right.

Arnie: Yeah, I think I heard that too.

Cara: Yeah. It'd be like, God, if you do this, then [Because, in general, yeah}, you know, I mean, his heart was in the right place. He really didn't want to mess this job up.

Bryan: Yeah. I think I mentioned Abraham's request to God about Sodom technically could be a prayer, but this is the first formal prayer.

Cara: I found that so interesting [Yeah], that that was the first recorded prayer and it was kind of like, hey, if you do this, then....

Bryan: It is interesting.

Arnie: I find interesting is, I don't hear it so much anymore, but when I became a new believer, there's a couple of years where I wanted to hear everyone's story, how they came to know the Lord and how can you trust? And several people said, I did this kind of a prayer and had a sign, and God answered it, and that's how they knew He lived. And I always looked for, wow, that means it's probably going to happen to me, which it never has. But there were several people who almost set it up. And I remember as a new believer, yeah, that's pretty cool, but I would think Satan might hear prayers and you could actually set yourself up to stumble, and that may not be a good way to live your Christian life.

Bryan: You know, God wants to be known. So He answers because the person's genuinely seeking, but that doesn't mean the methodology is best.

Cara: I would say before I really understood that it didn't have anything to do with me, my prayers before were kind of like, what you just said, give me a sign.

Bryan: Yeah. It's eliminating faith, and it's turned it into a walk of sight, and we want that. [Yeah.] But like when Paul left Philippi, everything possible went wrong. Got to Jerusalem, was arrested, was imprisoned. Went to Caesarea, in prison for two years, shipped to Rome. The ship wrecks, gets on the island of Malta, bit by a snake, two months, gets to Rome, ends up in prison. It's like, if circumstances were an indication of God's will, it's like, what do you make of that?

Cara: Would you say though, that circumstances show sometimes that we're on the right track, that we're working for God, and we're a force, and something evil is trying to stop us from moving?

Bryan: Well it can.

Cara: Is that proper theology I guess?

Bryan: I mean the likelihood that the enemy's going to interfere is high, and maybe it's going to leave somebody alone that's on the wrong track. Circumstances are never great indicators of [of either way] theology. [Okay.] It's, there's just a risk to it. [Right.] Better go with principles than circumstances.

Cara: Try not to overthink it. Just go.

Bryan: Yeah. [Okay]. Just be obedient.

Cara: Arise. Go.

Bryan: Right.