

Abraham

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Now, Abraham is a lot different than Adam and Eve, a lot different than Cain, a lot different than Noah, in at least this one thing: we've got a lot of information on this old boy.

Now, this is to me, one of the greatest things about character studies. And you can't do it with every character in the Bible. But I hope what you'll do is, you'll take what we do with Abraham here in this class, and you'll start trying to do it with as many characters in the Bible as you can. You start looking at their life as a whole, and you start seeing the development of their faith, you start seeing their growth in the faith. And you sometimes see they're falling in the faith and becoming less strong in the faith. You can see this over time, instead of a snapshot. Boom! You know, we all know about Abraham's call. We know about his lie to Pharaoh. We all know about Hagar, and the birth of Ishmael. We know about, you know, Lot. We know about these things. You know. We know about the sacrifice of Isaac. But what we seldom do in character study here, is we seldom tie it together, look at it from beginning to end, and start seeing the ebb and flow of his life. Because that's really how you and I look at ours.

I've got a friend of mine, who wrote a book. It's called, "Seeing God in the Rearview Mirror." And what he means by that (he's in his 70s), and he says, you know, "I'm able to sit here, and I'm able to look at the back, over the last, say, 60 years of my life, and I'm able to see God's hand in things that I thought were tragedies, and see His hand in things that I thought were great ups and downs, ups and downs, that at the time, I just simply wasn't able to see." What do you think of that idea?"

Abraham is sometimes given this label, "Father of the Faith." Some translations make it, "Father of the faithful." Now, what I had done, when I first became a Christian, is I had read Abraham, I have put him up on a pedestal. Here he is. And after a while of putting him up on that pedestal (he's the father of the faithful, father of the faith, whatever), I began to think, "Man, I can't do that. I'm not that." That was a mistake. He's precisely the father of the faithful, because he is very, very much like you and me.

What we're going to see as we go through Abraham's life, is we're going to see a high point and a low point, a high point and a low point, a high point and a high point and a low point, high point, low point, low point, high point, low point, high point, high point, low, all the way. And what you're going to see is, if you look at in a stock market sense, if you look at a stock market or a commodity futures chart, they like to talk to you about what they call trends. Is the trend going up or the trend going down? Or is the trend just flat like this? Well, that's what you're going to be able to see in Abraham's life, once we put it all together, is you're going to be able to see his faith growing and trend and flatlining and growing and declining and growing. And what God is going to do through every single one of these parts of his life, God is going to move Abraham from where he is, not physically, although He does that too. He's going to move him from where he is spiritually to where he needs to be spiritually. To me, this is just one of the...It just kind of gives me chills whenever I think of this this kind of thought with Abraham.

Okay, well I said to read the last part of chapter 11. This is talking about his father, Terah. Okay? Abraham is a real person who lived in real places, who lived in real towns where we can identify them. And so, you know, this is a very different thing than what happens in other world religions: Hinduism, Shintoism, Buddhism, on and on and on.

Okay, let's take a look now at chapter 12, verses 1-3. "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Get out of your country, from your family, from your father's house to a land, I will show you, I'll make you a great nation. I'll bless you make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him who curses you, and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" Now, if you and I are going to start a study of the two covenants, the Old Covenant, the New Covenant...If we're going to start a study that this is the point at where you start that. But, we're going to kind of ignore that. Because that's not the point of this particular study. We're going to look at Abraham himself.

So Abraham is told to get out of his country get away from his father's house. And notice now in verse four, "Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, Lot went with him. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran." Isn't that interesting? Haran. Where was he originally? Ur. In other words, Abraham's told to get out of his family. And he does make the move. But he takes his father with him.

And so they get no further than the city of Haran until his father dies. When his father dies, now finally, Abraham is willing to, you know, get away from his family, and even then what does he do? Even then he takes his nephew. So what you have here is a tremendous testament to Abraham's faith.

How much faith would it take if you'd been living 70 some odd years in a place, and God just comes to you and tells you, "I want you to go where I'm going to tell you to go"? And God doesn't tell him where to go.

Think about what's going on here. Abraham has lived in this place for 70 some odd years. He's got a lot of family. He's got his career, he knows how to deal with things. And what God does, He says, "You just get up and you go." How much faith does that take? Oh, man, I don't know how to quantify it. I can't tell you it's three of this, or eight of this or 27 of that. But it's a lot of faith for a man to do that and to go.

So, he starts to go but he is still, he has weaknesses of his faith in that he can't quite let it go. So he brings Dad along. And then he brings, you know, Lot along. Well, as long as Dad is in tow, he stops, God stops him, because he, remember God did not tell him the destination. So what you have now is, you have Abraham, who now is, is getting ready to go on the second leg of this journey. Why would God not tell Abraham where he's going?

Why does God not tell Abraham where to go? Because if he tells him where to go, what's Abraham going to do? He's going to tell everybody else too. He's going to tell his family, he's going to tell the servants, he's going to tell his people. He's not going to keep it a secret, probably. And so what happens then, then people start following him. And what God's purpose here is, is to break Abraham away. This is the beginning of the covenant separation that I was telling you about. His purpose is to break Abraham's ties to his family and to his locality. So now he, he goes on.

Well, let's take a look here. At this place right here. Look at verse six. Look at verse six. The last part of verse five says, "So they came to the land of Canaan." Verse six: "Abram passed

through the land, to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants, I will give this land.' And here he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. And then he moved from there to the mountain, east in Bethel. He pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east and built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord." And so Abraham journeyed, still going on south. So, Abraham's in the land.

Just think about what God has done to him now. God has told you to go west. When he gets there, he says, "This is the land your family's going to inherit it." In other words, God tells Abraham, excuse my grammar, he says, "You are where you are supposed to be." Now, you know, all of my life, I've mostly tried to do what God wants me to do, what I think that is true. I've tried to be where it seems as though he's opening the doors for me to be, but I've never once had God say, "Dave, you are where you are supposed to be." It's always been a lot less sure than that. I would love it, if one time God would say to me, "Dave, you are where you're supposed to be. You're doing what you're supposed to be doing." I don't know if you'd like that or not, but I sure would. But I don't believe God's going to give me this. God gave it to Abraham. Isn't that something? That's a testimony to his faith. So he's now had a victory in faith.

But now, as you read through the text, God does a strange thing. God sends a famine in the land. Now, think about what God has set up for Abraham here. He's told him to go to this land, and he does. When he gets there, he says, "This is the place." And as soon as Abraham is ensconced in the place, God makes it almost impossible for him to stay there. Almost impossible. Abraham has family, he has flocks. He has herds. He's got people that work for him. He's going to get wiped out. So what does Abraham do? He goes to Egypt. That is a failure in his faith. It is one of the many times when Abraham makes a bad decision. He's told this is where you're supposed to be, and he just heads on down there.

Now, we understand the weakness. But, I want you to see that Abraham is not the perfect man. Now, we all know what happens when he gets to Egypt.

Well, they do go from bad to worse. That's right. He shows up and you know, he says, "Pharaoh is a man who takes what he wants." Looks at Sarah, says, "Hey, you're good looking." You tell him you're my sister, and not my wife, because I don't want him to kill me so that he can marry you. The word that I prefer not to say, I prefer not to say Abraham "lied." Although, I really think he did. I will say without hesitancy, he was deceptive. Clearly he was deceptive.

And so, Abraham, now, here's the father of the faith. Would you call Abraham a liar? Well he did. But you see, there's a difference between someone who does something, and someone who is something. That's important. That's why I spent that little time on Noah. Is because, here is Abraham. He's got to...what is he afraid of? He's afraid of getting killed. Now, he can justify in his mind, "You know the Lord's promised me that if I have, that I'm going to have these kids, but we haven't got any kids, and so I can't die." We can say he was trying to protect God. But what I really think he was doing, he was just plain afraid.

Here's the thing we're going to see, and on through Abraham's life...we're going to see this conflict. God is going to give him an instruction, make a promise, etcetera. And then God is going to put Abraham in a situation that seems to make that impossible to happen. And God is going to do it time after time, after time, after time, until he finally gets to the point where

Abraham accepts the promise and doesn't try to protect himself, or the promise. That's the battle.

You and I are told not to lie. You and I are told to be honest. You and I are told to, you know, to be generous. You and I are told to do a lot of things. But what keeps us back a lot of times is fear. "If I do that, how can I provide for my family." "If I do that, then I'm going to lose my job." "If I do that..." You see what happens? We know what we should do, but we, but we, we can't do it because there's things that pressure us to go the other way. Abraham's exactly that way. And's going to fail as many times as he succeeds. But he's never going to quit. And I think that's something we can learn. He is the father of the faith.

We see faults in them. But what you have to realize, and I think what you'll see next week after I get though with some of this, is you'll see how deep some of these faults in Abraham are. Some of these faults are really endemic. Really down in his skin. And his sins are going to involve a very large number of people that he has to convince to sin with him. Now, it's bad enough to be a sinner. How bad is it to convince other people to join you in that? That's exactly what he's going to do.

Here's the assignment that I'd like you to do. Abraham not only tells Pharaoh this lie about his wife, there's another character, another guy, that Abraham tells the same lie to. What I'd like you to do is to read that. It's Abimelech. You can find it, just read through it. It's Abimelech. And in that confrontation, Abraham is going to say something that lets you know that this lie that Abraham is telling was not a spur of the moment, fear driven, decision.

Okay, well, let's kind of pick up with Genesis, a little bit of review, Genesis 12:1, "He had said..." Now, you know, we talked about a translation issue there. If you look at some English versions, the word is, "God had said to Abraham, 'Get out of the land,'" which means it was prior to the event of the moment. Some translations say, "God said," which is just merely past tense which kind of makes it look like, you know, he hadn't told him beforehand.

And so, you know, I'm not going to go into any of the Hebrew type information there, other than to say, that Hebrew tenses are very much different than ours. Believe it or not, Hebrew does not have a past tense. Hebrew does not have a present tense. And Hebrew does not have a future tense. They think of it as completed action, or action in progress, or action yet to be done. And so, a translator has to come in here and use the context to see what's going on. And using your English versions, you can decide the context whether it's more likely that he is saying, "God had said this," earlier. And now, Abraham is finally at the point where he's ready to take off. Or, you can look at it and think, "Well, God is saying," this is the first time the message is being given to him. And like I said last week, I kind of fall down on the side that "had said" is a more accurate rendition. Because otherwise, what is the point of all of the material in the last part of chapter 11, that deals with his father Terah? But, you know, that's just the thought, and you go from there.

So what you see now, as we talked about last time, in chapter 12, God tells Abraham, "You go..." And, he doesn't really tell him where. And so, when Abraham gets to the land of Canaan, God then takes him and says, "You look around; all of this is where you're going to be." And so as far as I'm concerned, that is a tremendous high point in Abraham's spiritual growth. He's done what he was supposed to have done. It was difficult. It was painful, he separated himself

from his family. You know, it just absolutely just took off. And, and so now he's in a good spot. But you'll remember after that, almost immediately, when God says, "This is where you're supposed to be," then God sends a famine that tests, you know, whether he thinks He can be there or not.

And this is one of the times when Abraham fails, he absolutely makes a poor decision. He goes down into Egypt. It's then when we get into Egypt, that you'll notice, he makes that lie that we all are very familiar with. And so he says Sarah is his sister, which in and of itself is not the lie, but says that Sarah is not his wife. And the real point there is that Abraham is wanting to spare his own life.

Now, what is the cost? The cost is more than the lie. The cost is the willingness that his wife be taken by another man into his harem, marriage, concubinage, whatever you want to call it. Now, I don't know about you. But I think that's pretty...that's pretty tough. That's pretty tough for the father of the faithful to do that to his wife and require it, you see.

But now let's kind of think about that just a little further, how deep that sin goes. Abraham wouldn't have been able to do, to commit, this sin if he did not have a lot of help. Every single person in his entourage, every single person that worked with him and traveled with him, and was there. Every single one of them had to be in on it. Why would that be? Well, because if any one of them spoke up and said something, just said something the wrong way, in the wrong moment, all of a sudden, the lie would be exposed, and the whole point would collapse. So, here you have the father of the faithful, who is not only willing to tell a lie, not only willing to put his wife at risk, he is also involving all of these people who are with him in the lie also. And also, in the acknowledgement that she's free to go with somebody else, you see. So, what I want you to get a sense of is really how deep this sin is, and how wide ranging this sin is.

Well, let's go on a little further. When you you figure, when that happened, somehow Pharaoh figures it out. And Pharaoh is giving him a lot of money, giving him a lot of gold, a lot of silver, and sending him back on his way. And so when Abraham departs, he's rebuked, he learns, but he goes away a very wealthy man. Goes back on into Egypt.

Well, the next thing that happens, he is so wealthy now. And, God is blessing him and Lot, then come chapter 13. Lot and and Abraham have to split. If you notice about verse six, they, their herds and flocks can't stay together in the same area. And even their herdsmen are, the ones who work for each of the other two guys, they're starting to bicker and fight about who gets the best pasture.

What I think you'll notice here is that Abraham has a high point in his spiritual growth. Because he takes Lot aside, he says, "Look around, 360 degrees, anywhere you want to go, you take the land you want, and I'll take whatever's left over." Now, to me, that represents a spiritual growth, because Abraham is not feeling like he's got to protect himself. He knows the promise. He trusts the promise, he's willing to take whatever is left over. And he's quite generous with this. And so to me, this is a high point in his spiritual growth.

Now, Lot chooses the very best of the best, doesn't he? And of course, you we know the story, Lot goes down towards Sodom and Gomorrah, you know, where the watered plane was beautiful and green. And that becomes another problem later on. But that's not Abraham's issue.

Now, the last part of chapter 13, verses 14 through 17, what you'll notice is that the promise, the promise is reaffirmed. And you're going to notice this throughout Abraham's life, is that at several points in time, God is going to reaffirm this promise of the land. Every single one of God's repetitions of the promise becomes more and more specific. And sometimes they become more and more memorable. You see?

Let's go on in chapter 14, and in chapter 14, you know, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. The five cities. They rebel against the people who were, had, taken tribute from them. As a result, the kings, they, the foreign kings, they come in, they invade the land. One of the things you have to remember about this time is that foreign invaders very seldom took over the land. They very seldom did that. That was just too much work for them. They went in and they let the local rulers be the local rulers as long as the local rulers funneled the money back to the conqueror. That's what they did. Well, when the money dries up, the conquerors come back, and this time what they did was they took everybody out of these cities, made them slaves, took all their possessions and marched back to Mesopotamia.

Well, how's that affect Abraham? Abraham now, I think, has another high point in his faith. He gathers the men who are with him, and the text says 316, or something like that. That's a lot of people. Now think how many people were involved in that lie I mentioned about before. He's got quite a crew working with him, you see. And also, he gets a bunch of people from around in the community. So here is Abraham able to put together a large body of armed men, because he's trusted. I want you to think about that. Abraham is trusted. Even though virtually all of the people at least within his, you know, family and group, they all know that he's telling some of these lies. A little bit of conflict there, isn't it?

We look around ourselves, and we see the mixture, mixture in ourselves and mixture in someone else, mixture and other people who are trying to be faithful. So you see this mixture, within Abraham's situation. And so, some people are very much trusting of him. And all these people are following him into battle. They trust Him, even though they understand the lie. Well, Abraham then goes, he conquers. And that's great. He's very much trusting in God's providence, that he will succeed here.

He comes back. And the king of Sodom says, "Hey, you've rescued us, you take all the stuff, just let us have," you know, "the people, then let us go back." And Abraham then, again, I think shows a tremendous amount of faith. He says, "I don't need the stuff," says, "I don't want the stuff."

Now interestingly, he has two things to add to that. First, he says, "I'm not going to allow anyone to say that the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, so on and so forth, made Abraham rich." Because see, that's exactly what they would be saying about the situation from Egypt, because that's exactly what happened. So he doesn't want a repeat of that. But the second thing he also says is, "Now, I'm not going to take mine, but the men who are with me," you know, "they take whatever it is that they have earned." He is not going to force his own generosity on someone else. So, that's a high point, I think, in his faith.

Well, let's go to the next part, Chapter 15. After this high point, now, God reaffirms the promise. God reaffirms him. But notice, in verse eight, Abraham asks for reassurance. He says, "Okay, you've given me this promise..." "How do I know?" Would you have the courage to do that? I'm not altogether sure I would. And yet he does. And you know, I don't know if that's a

high point in his faith, a low point in his faith, but it's a, you know, it's a very human thing to do, I think. Just to wonder, in his mind. The bold part of it is that he actually asks, you see, and so God then gives him a vision that is just unbelievably memorable. And so this is again, a reaffirmation of the promise, the promise is more detailed and more vivid. So Abraham is, is getting more and more strength out of these things. You see.

Well, you take a look now, in verse six, Chapter 16. This comes to be a tremendous failure on Abraham's part, and I think we all recognize that. But, I'm not so sure we actually exercise and wrap our minds around the depth of this failure. He knows that the child is to be his, and Sarah is barren. So Sarah comes and says, "Hey, I got this handmaid. You just go and you make her your concubine, second wife, whatever it is. You go and have a child with her." And so, Abraham says, "Okay." Well, that in and of itself is a bit of a failure. I don't know if it's on Sarah's part, or Abraham's part. A little bit of both, I think. You know, they're basically thinking this, "I've got to take the promise in my own hand."

So what they then do, is, you know, she gets pregnant, and now she's, Hagar, is pregnant, she starts kind of ragging on Sarah, you know. Because in that culture, woman who couldn't be pregnant was really kind of a second class citizen. And so Hagar starts ragging on her, apparently. Sarah says, "Kick Hagar out." So here's Hagar, and she's pregnant. What's Abraham do? You know what he does. He does what Sarah says. And in fact, it was interesting how he says it. He says, "You do what you want to do?"

Do you ever notice an echo in the crucifixion of Jesus with someone else who says that? Pilate, in the book of Matthew, says the very same thing. He washes his hands, and he says, "I'm not having anything to do with this decision. You take him, and you do what you want." Here is the father of the faithful, who is doing the exact same kind of thing as Pontius Pilate, who is one of the most evil people in all of history, as you hear people tell it. I don't know whether he is or not, but that's how it's told. So you start seeing Abraham in a little bit of a different light here.

But now I want you to think about what this does. What would you think? What would you think of an old rich man who got a young girl pregnant, and then, because it became trouble for him, he kicks her out with nothing? Now, this girl doesn't have family. This girl doesn't have skills. This girl is pregnant. This girl doesn't know anything about where she is. She's got no education. She's got nothing. What would you and I call a person who did that to a young girl that he had gotten pregnant? You and I know what we'd call that. That's just about as low-life as it gets. This is Abraham. Like, wow!

And in fact, finally, God just tells Hagar, says, "You go back and you submit to your your mistress," you know. He's not going to disrupt the family situation, God isn't. But he's going to basically tell Abraham, "You're not walking away on this one." And so, there it is. To me, that's just an amazingly powerful thing to realize how low Abraham got.

And so, now it is 16 years before God ever has anything to talk to Abraham about again. Abraham is kind of, you know, he's out on his own now, for a while. 13 years later, God appears to him again, and reaffirms the covenant. And this is a point at which He changes his name from Abram, to Abraham. Okay? Father of many nations, and changes Sarah, too. This is where He institute's the covenant of circumcision, which says that everyone in Abraham's

family and everyone in Abraham's household, all the male children have to be circumcised on the eighth day. Okay? This is where it begins.

And so Abraham intercedes for Ishmael. Abraham is basically being told, you know, your wife is going to be pregnant. And, Abraham has learned to love Ishmael. And he says, "Oh Lord, bless Ishmael." And, God does do that. But He says, "He's not the one. So, now he's going to be blessed. You're not going to be hurting. But he's not the one for the promise." You see? So Abraham is getting more and more clear, more and more clear.

Now, these three men appear. Now I think those three men, in my mind, I don't know. But, I think one of them was probably the second person of the Godhead. I can't predict it. Just some things he says, predicted. I can't prove it. But it, just some things in the way that they talk that makes me, makes me think this. But either way, Abraham recognizes they're from God.

So now they come in, and they're going to give Abraham the promise again, of Sarah having the child. And you notice that Sarah laughs and Sarah has received an awful lot of flack for that. I don't know that she deserves it. Because if you look at the chapter previous God had made the very same statement to Abraham. And, Abraham laughed. Look down, if you would at verse 17, Chapter 17, verse 17. Abraham laughs and says almost identically with his mouth the same thing Sarah thinks in her mind, which is, "What? She's going to be having a kid at her age?" And so Abraham is doing the same thing. I think it's just a natural reaction. I don't know that it's faithless. I don't know that it's faithful. I just know, it's it's surprise. What happens a lot of times, people will laugh and chuckle. And then, Sarah gets a lot of bad press, because the angel says, "You laughed," and she says, "Oh, no, not me."

Well, how many times have you ever just all of a sudden, you know, "No, not me"? You know, that makes me look bad. So I just [pew] flash the denial. It's very human; very normal.

So I think this is a bit of a high time for Abraham, because he's getting these promises, although even there, there's a little, you know, some question mark in there.

And now, if you look at chapter 18, and verse 19, particularly, God says, "I'm going to bring these blessings on Abraham." And He says an interesting thing. He says, "I'm going to be able to do this." Note that phrase, "I'm going to be able to do this, because He will teach his children and their children after him." Even the covenant that God had made with Abraham was conditional. It wasn't just something God was going to do no matter what happened. Abraham had some obligation here.

And you may even remember, in the book of Exodus, long about Exodus 32. At one point, after the golden calf incident, God told Moses, "I'm going to wipe them out and start over with you." It was conditional, the promise was conditional, in other words. So, God isn't just throwing this out, "Because I'm wanting to do this." He's requiring, this is a covenant He's requiring back and forth.

Now, you take a look, then, in chapter 18, when he's talking about Abraham, when Abraham is talking with these three, about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. You know the story, right? Abraham bargains him down, says 50, 40, 30, 20, so on like that. 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. And he asks an interesting question, which is almost a kind of an accusation against God. He says, "Will not the judge of all the earth do right? You know what's right, God. Aren't you going to do it?" I think that's pretty bold. And you think about it, here is the man who's

had this lie, and had this situation with Hagar. And now he's going to confront God and basically hold God's feet to the fire to make the right judgment. I don't know what to make of that too much. Except, is that not just the way people are? People think that way.

Well, goes on a little further. Now, let's go look at chapter 20. Do you remember me, last week, mentioning, the second time Abraham told this lie? Okay, Abraham goes to a city called Gerar. And there's a ruler there called Abimelech. Now, Abimelech is not his name. He, you might even call him "the Abimelech," just like "the Pharaoh," "the Caesar," "the Emperor," "the whatever." You know? It's a title. "Abi - melech" means "father, King." Okay. And so "the Abimelech," he's the king over there. And Abraham tells the very same lie.

Now, as you go through this, what I want you to notice is that this has a lot more detail than what was included in the first instance, in Egypt. God appears to Abimelech in a dream and says, "You're a dead man." And he says, "Why? Why are you going to kill me, an innocent man?" And, he also says something very interesting: "And an innocent nation." "An innocent nation." What's the nation got to do with it? Well, what you'll begin to see is Abraham, his wife, Sarah, had actually been taken into Abimelech's household.

Now you know, you can call it a harem or whatever else. Abimelech protests to God, he says, "I haven't touched her. And God says, "I know that. That's why you're not dead." And he said, "That's exactly because I made that, made it, happen this way." So, God didn't let it go as bad as it could. But now He says, "You give this man back because he's a prophet. You give his wife back to him."

This idea about destroying a nation. A little further down in the story, you will notice the Bible says that God healed the wombs of the people of Gerar and Abimelech's household, because their wombs had been shut. So, you see, God had actually already initiated a punishment for them taking Sarah. But think about what that means. How long had Sarah been taken by Abimelech? Long enough for the people of Gerar and Abimelech's household to realize they weren't getting pregnant. Now, I don't think they would have figured that out in a month. I don't know that they'd have figured it out in two, maybe in three. But, and who knows how much longer it would have gone? And in those days, just like it would be nowadays, a general, no having babies, is a death sentence. To the people, it's a death sentence.

So, Abraham had allowed Sarah to be taken into this house for a long time. And he had no assurance that she wasn't taken in completely. We start thinking about how low he's sinking again. That's why it is up and down, up and down, up and down. It's the same.

Now, here's even the best part for our understanding of Abraham. Abimelech, asks him, he says, "Why did you tell me this lie?" And then Abraham gives a really interesting revelation. He said, "Because this is the agreement I made with my wife. Before we left the land of my father's, that in every place we go, we would tell that she is my sister and not my wife." In other words, the lie he told to Pharaoh was a planned policy lie. Abraham told this lie, place after place after place after place, he involved everyone in his family, he involved all of the servants. And they all had to keep this lie going. So here is Abraham wrapping this deception around everybody that's a part of his life. And this is the father of the faithful. When you start thinking how low he sunk, when we start thinking about, "Well, maybe, can I be what he was?" Maybe so. Maybe...

Well, and then finally, finally, of course, you have the situation with Isaac. God tells Abraham to take Isaac his only son. This is the son of the promise. And he says, "Now you go, and you walk three days to a hill called Moriah. You take him up there, and you offer him as a burnt sacrifice to me." Now, that's tough. Because you see, what is Abraham's fear all the time been? The whole time, he's up and down, up and down, up and down. He is sometimes seeing how God is going to protect him. And he acts that way. But many times he is afraid that he's not going to be protected. And he acts that way. His fear and his lack of faith are at conflict with the promise sometimes. And what God is doing is God is building him over the years to a point where his faith in the promise is strong enough where God can finally give Abraham a command that directly destroys the promise. Because He even said, you're going to have this land, it's going to be through your children. No, it's not going to be just any children. It's going to be that child. And here is Isaac about 17 years old, and he is going to be killed before he even becomes the father of one person.

That is the final victory and high point where Abraham is finally brought to the point where he actually is what he is supposed to be. He's been where he was supposed to be. But now he actually is what he is supposed to be. And it took God a long time to work with him. So that's the summary.

And that's the whole point that Abraham had finally come to: he was wrong on how God would solve the problem. But, he was absolutely right to realize that God would solve the problem, and didn't need Abraham's help to do it.

And that, I think, is a situation we all face in our lives. You know, whenever we have problems at work, whenever we have problems within our families. Whenever we have problems. You know, just all kinds of temptations to commit sin, a lot of what we do is absolute fear. And fear will cause us to do things that anybody else would recognize as just really terrible. If you knew somebody who had done what Abraham had done, built this lie, his life on a lie for however many decades, would you not be tempted to call Abraham a liar? Constantly, constantly? Of course you are. I would be tempted. But I don't think that's right.

I remember hearing a guy one time, he told the story as if it happened to himself. Said his kid was in elementary school, or something, and called into the principal's office And said he didn't do it. And so dad was called in, and principal said, "Your son said he didn't do it, and I think he did." And the father says, "Well, are you calling my son a liar?" He says, "Yeah." He said, "Well, why are you doing that?" He says, "Same reason that I'd call you a liar. Or someone might call me a liar. I know, that given enough pressure, anyone will tell a lie. Given the right incentive, the right pressure."

Well, that may not be 100 percent true. But I think that's what all of us recognize, when we see what's happening in Abraham's life. A deep fear. And so, we're not going to call him a liar, because that wasn't his general way of dealing with people. The fact that he could put together this army, the fact that he was well trusted, is evidence that he was not thought of as a deceptive type of person, generally speaking. And yet, he had this problem.

It's interesting, Hebrews says that God, because He could swear by no one greater. Think about it when people tell an oath, you know: "So help me God." You know. "I swear on the Bible," you know. All those: "I swear on my mother's grave." That kind of thing. What they're trying to do is they're trying to invoke someone bigger, better, stronger, more honorable than

they themselves are in order to boost the fact that they are telling the truth when they make a promise. And the Bible says, "Well God, since He could swear by No One greater than Himself swears by Himself." He says, "Hey, I'm telling you this. This is the way it is."

And how does God work in your life. And in mine? I think this goes back to what I was saying last week about a friend of mine who wrote a book said, "Seeing God in the rearview mirror." It's, it's the idea of, you know, you and I can look back in our lives and see how God has molded and worked. But one of the things that I think is important for the day to day grind of our life in the faith, is that we realize that when we make bad decisions, even very bad decisions, the main thing we have to realize is we don't quit the faith. Because as long as we don't quit the faith, God isn't quitting us. And He's going to make the moves and over the course of our life. And so we don't need to beat ourselves up about all of this stuff.

And I think we can be fairly gentle about other people with their, it just seems like their constants, constant problems, you know, that people have with various parts of their faithfulness.

How many of you are familiar with the Catholic idea of purgatory? Okay. Well, the basic idea of purgatory is that you're there to be punished for your sins until you've been punished enough and you've paid for them and then you get to go on and go to Heaven. In other words, if you make it into purgatory, you at least know the end results are going to be good, even though the temporary result is very, very bad, and, and so on. There was a lot of terrible things that came out of that. Okay?

But why, Why would anybody start thinking of something like purgatory? In other words, Abraham is an old man, Abraham has had this whole life to grow, and grow, and grow, and grow. Well, what about someone who gets cut off before that growth is finished? And so they came up and invented the idea of purgatory where the growth continues, until it is done. That's what purgatory is all about.

Now, I don't necessarily agree with that. In fact, I don't agree with that. I, but here's the other side of the coin: I don't know how God is going to deal with the spiritual growth of someone who is baptized into Christ, walks out and then gets hit by a car, versus somebody who's, you know, lived their life for 80 years faithful and grown through all the trouble of trials, tribulations, and so on. It is what it's for.

Well, next week, what I want to do is, is I want to look at the last character we'll have a chance to look at. And, I want to look at the life of Jacob. Because Jacob, his growth pattern is very, very similar to Abraham's. And yet, most of the time, we know this little thing about Jacob, this thing about Jacob, that thing about Jacob. But we don't stretch and see the whole pattern here. And so, he'll be another example.

And these guys are called what? The patriarchs? The fathers of the faith. And I think the father of the faith is because they precisely were not significantly different than us, in their normal humanity. They were different than us, sometimes, in the fact that they were willing to get up and keep going and not just turn their back on God.

Thank you very much!