

The Promise

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Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Thank you, Julian. Maybe whilst we're doing that, can I invite us to stand for the word of the Lord. Thank you, Julian.

And said, do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and to your offsprings, I will give all these lands. And I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham, your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat.

Please take a seat. Thank you. I had a deja vu moment this week. As you can see, we're in Genesis 26. And we've been going through Genesis since Easter.

[1:28] So it's been a long time that we've been going through. We're just plodding through this book and had a deja vu moment as I read this chapter this week. Actually, I was having lunch with Ken, and we were just talking about how Genesis just feels like it just keeps going.

And actually, especially this chapter, it was like, whoa, haven't we read this before? Doesn't this sound quite similar? And I deliberately asked JP just to stop there because I want to retell the story. There are small differences in it, but my goodness, it feels the same. It feels the same as what we've read before. It feels exactly like the stuff that his dad, Abraham, went through, and we're here again. It really made me reflect on one thing, which was actually maybe that is just part of the human life.

It is just part of journey, that actually we keep subjecting ourselves often to the same old things. We keep facing the same old problems. We keep doing the same things, and we are just trapped in this cyclical existence.

Of course, we've already established earlier in Genesis, the Christian faith isn't one that's linear. It isn't the moment you commit. Suddenly, you're on a rocket ship to heaven. That's not quite what it is. If anything, it's just this slow grind, and it's just a constant cycle of wrestling with the different problems.

[2:37] The same shadows keep appearing, and we have to keep fighting, and we have to keep growing. But in our growth, the hope, the prayer, is that we get closer and closer to Jesus. And so what we see here is that even though there are these same old problems, there is also the same old grace that keeps appearing time and time again.

This chapter is the only chapter that is focused on Isaac. Remember, there are the founding fathers of the faith. You have Abraham, and then you have Isaac, and then you have Jacob. Isaac is stuck almost as the middle child of this three musketeer set up.

He had a great father. He will have a great son. But he's kind of stuck in the middle with just one chapter to him, and that's it. And even this one chapter feels very similar and feels very same old to the one of his dad.

But we're going to look at it, and what we're going to find out is that humanity seems to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Of course, I'd encourage you as we look at this and go, Isaac, you're pretty stupid.

To kind of go, wait. Wait, is that me? And honestly, I look at this book, I often think, especially the Old Testament, it just feels like a mirror to the stuff that's going on inside of my own heart.

[3:49] Chinese, what? You look at this, and you just see a goblin in this book, and you're like, oh, I do. That goblin is me. And so what we see here is the same old thing. And it does sound repetitive, but what we can see is that there is something that also keeps popping up again and

again.

And I want to focus on that today. And if this chapter is on anything, it's actually not even Isaac. It's once again about God. It's once again about he is good.

It's once again about how he has grace, despite whatever we do, however far we run, whatever stupid mistakes we make, he is still here. And so that's what we're going to see here from 26, which is going to fly straight through, verse 1.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine, that was in the days of Abraham. So the writer almost knows this and says, hey, this has kind of happened before, which tells me one thing again. Actually, the chapter before, chapter 25, verse 11, if you just flick over there, you see his dad dies.

Abraham dies. And immediately after that, God blesses Isaac, his son. So in the midst of grief, he gets a blessing. In the midst of grief, he gets the blessing.

[4:55] And so you see here, what's interesting about the blessing that is different to how we think about blessings sometimes is when we think we're going to get a blessing from God, we think things are going to be going great. Actually, this is going to be a good year.

My investments are going to go well. My work is going to go well. My family is going to go well. But what you see here is God blesses. Isaac receives it in a moment of grief, in a time of grief when he loses his dad.

And what happens straight after? Famine. It's important for us to just deconstruct, just deattach, that when we think about God's blessings, it always means just complete harvest.

And of course, we know reality is it is not always harvest. In fact, life often, more often than not, is hard. And I've said before, the book of Genesis just seems like just a story of grief as well.

What is the main grief from that initial misstep, that initial mistrust? You end up with people who die. Genesis chapter 5, and he dies, and he dies, and he dies, and he dies, and he dies.

[6:02] I've also said that grief is actually a gift from God. I've felt that this is something that's been true of my life. Last week, I shared briefly that an aunt that's very, very dear to Joe and I, who was just part of our childhood growing up, was, if honestly, if you think about why we were so connected to Hong Kong and so connected to Chinese culture, she would be the one.

We would come home to Hong Kong every summer, and our family of four would go and stay in her tiny little flat in Yunlong, with her family there, all packed in, one toilet, one bathroom, and she would just display this immense hospitality to us throughout the whole summer.

Can you imagine that? I don't think I could do that. And she would shower us with gifts. I remember the first time I brought Christina to go see her, the first thing that she did was just stuff Christina's pocket with money.

Just like brown notes. And I was like, whoa, whoa, what's that? Why does she get it? Just intense generosity that we got from her.

And it was sad to say, on Monday, we went to the hospital, and it was her final few hours. And I got to hold her hand. And I got to joke with her kids. And there's just this beautiful moment where I was holding her hand, retelling some of these stories.

[7:18] And we were laughing. At this point, she was so heavily dosed with morphine, she couldn't hear us anymore. And as we were joking, the nurses run in and say, she's gone. And I was like, wow. What a gift from God that I got to hold the hand of someone whom I loved, who had a profound impact on me.

And I got to watch her step from one side to the other. Grief was God's gift to me. He opened up the curtain to show me that life isn't just what there is in this life.

I then got to carry that grief into every meeting and into every interaction, often about worldly things and things that we're facing in this world. And I'm like, oh, but it doesn't matter. I don't know if you're carrying grief.

I know that I've been with some of you in the hospital these last few weeks. And I remember hugging you and saying, this hurts. This is grief. But this is exactly why Jesus came.

Jesus didn't come just to give us a fun and good and pleasurable life and comfortable life. He came to deal with the very thing that we really find is horrible.

[8:32] Death, disease, sickness. Grief is God's gift to us to show us there's something more. And the gift that I got from what I learned from my aunt, I realized I now pass on.

The things that we do, Joe and I, we do, we don't even know it. And we realize, oh, that's where we got it from. Again, just being grateful for the people that we have in our lives.

But life is really just the same old thing. The same old problems that just keep coming back again. But how do you then not get sucked into that place where you are then just grieving without hope, which is what 1 Thessalonians 4 talks about?

No, because whilst there are the same old problems, there is also the same old grace that keeps coming up, back up and up. And every time, again, every time you meet something, there's a problem. You make a mistake, you trip, you fall.

Grace is there to catch you. That's why we're here. It's funny. God blesses Isaac and straight away there's a famine. And here is something really interesting. Without even really thinking about it, he does exactly the same thing his dad does, which is what?

[9:35] He heads straight to Egypt. The land that he was in was in famine. He's like, what do I do? I need food for my family. I'm going to head straight to Egypt, which is exactly what Abraham did. And of course, that's where you see in Genesis 12, his story there, which I won't go through today.

But you see Isaac doing exactly the same thing. But this time, there's something different. God stops him. So he heads towards Egypt and he stops in a place called Gerar, which is literally just in the middle. And there he meets the king Abimelech of the Philistines.

But this time, God intervenes. Last time, he let his dad Abraham go straight to Egypt. This time, he actually speaks and says, verse 2, Do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you.

For to you, to your offspring, I will give all these lands and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham, your father. Abraham is dead, but the God of Abraham is not. And now the God of Abraham is now the God of Isaac. If you follow me, if you trust me, if you obey me, the blessing will now be yours, is what he's saying.

Don't follow the same mistakes that your dad did. You can trust me. I'll call the Jew. You don't need to go to Egypt. How often do we, when the moment we have trouble, the moment we have problems, the moment we have anxiety, we go back to our Egypt.

[10:44] We go back to the things that we think, You know what? This isn't going to provide for me. Let me just go back to Egypt real quick. And then what happens? Then you get stuck in Egypt. You see the same thing happening here.

So Isaac settles in Gerar. And here's where I'll retell the story. And we won't read through all of it, because it just feels and sounds like déjà vu. He goes to Gerar.

And from there, when the men of the place asked him about his wife, coincidentally, his wife was just as beautiful as his mother. But he runs into the same thing. He is afraid.

He's afraid that these people in this foreign land were going to take his wife, and not only take his wife, but kill him in the process. So he does the same thing, which is, Wait. She's not my wife. She's my sister.

And I'm just like, are you kidding me? We're reading this again for the third time? That there's a founding father of the faith. Lies about his wife.

[11:38] And so at this point, I nearly switched off. I was like, here we go. Just another same old story. And so he says, she is my sister, for he feared to save my wife, thinking lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebecca.

What's interesting is they think that she's the sister. But then the king, actually, on one random day, catches Isaac talking to his wife.

And actually, they're just laughing and giggling and flirting. So he's actually caught flirting with his own wife. And the king comes up to him and goes, whoa. Why are you flirting with your sister? Whoa, she's not your sister. She's your wife.

How are you going to do us like that? Do you realize the guilt that you're going to put on us if we did that? And then Isaac says, because I thought, this is verse 9, lest I die because of a...

Abimelech said, what is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us. Isn't it interesting when someone outside of the church calls someone inside the church to a higher place?

[12:34] When we act even just sometimes worse than the people outside? For the third time, this happens. And thankfully, God intervenes and stops, and it doesn't happen.

And it tells me one thing. And we were reflecting on this over as a team this week. Isaac wasn't around when his dad did it for the first two times. So where would he have got it from? And it makes me think, and maybe I'm imagining a little bit more here, but it goes back to actually what I said about my aunt. It goes back to what I said about just some of the things that we catch from our parents that we don't even realize that we've caught.

Because he didn't see his dad lie about his mom. But you better believe that there were conversations at the dinner table joking about this topic.

Do you remember how we got rich? Do you remember when we went to Egypt and there was famine? And then dad was scared? And then he thought he'd lie about mom. And then God just blessed the whole situation, and we came out of Egypt even more rich than we were before.

[13:37] It makes me think, how much of what we hold is actually coming from our parents? How much of what we hold is coming from the people who have been holding important roles in our lives?

I often find, actually, so much of it is, and they say this about discipleship, they say this about any kind of teaching, it's caught, not taught. What Isaac learned from Abraham, maybe at the dinner table, maybe just living in everyday life, is choose, when you're afraid, lie.

When you are in a foreign land, do anything to preserve yourself. I wonder what we've been listening at our dinner tables that maybe we don't even realize that we've actually received from our parents.

There's a quote that's from Tim Keller from the book *The Empty Counterfeit Gods*. We tend to pass on to our children, not what we preach to them, but what we functionally love and fear. Parents, adults, just listen to that again.

We tend to pass on to our children, not what we preach to them, but what we functionally love and fear. If a father fears the opinion of man or relies on deceit for safety, his children will absorb that functional theology far more quickly than his verbal creed.

[14:54] I think that's always the battle. Why is life cyclical? Why do we keep running through the same old problems? Because we're on the same track of choosing, do I believe, do I have faith, or do I have fear?

And we all know, we've sat at tables with our family, with our parents, who have chosen one or the other, and you cannot underestimate the impact that has on a child. So even though he didn't see it happen, we know there's something there that is passed on generationally that we cannot escape. Vodhi Bochum says this, we do not sin in a vacuum. So often we think we sin in a vacuum. So often we think we make our decisions, and actually our kids won't see or the people around us won't see because it's just to do with us, and what you realize is actually our decisions are not made in a vacuum.

We are communal beings. Every decision we make impacts the person sat next to us, in front of us, behind us. We do not sin in a vacuum. Our choices construct a spiritual environment for those who follow us.

Unconfessed sin in a parent sets up a momentum of compromise that requires intentional, spirit-empowered resistance for a child to break. Don't we have that?

[16:01] I just want to sit there and part there for a second. Because I think about my life. I think about my kuma. I think about my dad. I think about, actually, growing up I used to say one thing about my dad is, my dad is a lot shorter than all the other people because he was five foot three.

So, I mean, the genes were always against us from the beginning. But he was really good at parking. Like, really good at parking. Just like one hand, swerving. You know, you put the arm on the back seat and you go like this.

Like this. I admired it. So, I was like, my dad might be shorter than yours, but my dad parks better than yours. Something else about my dad that I've shared about is just punctuality. Like, honestly, if you're not five minutes early, you are ten minutes late.

And we'd always sit there going, why are we waiting for those? I love it. Just people, just couples looking at each other as we... Anyway, I'm not going to address it. And we used to sit as kids in the car going, look, dad, let's be sensible here.

We know that family that we're meeting is going to be half an hour late. We know it. So, why don't we just show up the time that we know they're going to be? And he'd say, just because they're late doesn't mean that we will be late.

[17:16] And so, we will sit in the car and we will wait. And we don't have smartphones, so you're just going to listen to the songs that I'm listening to, Eric Clapton, and we're just... And that's going to be it. I realized I caught that.

I caught that from him. He didn't necessarily... He did teach as well. But I caught that. I wonder what you have. Let me go around here and ask. What did you catch? Aidan, what have you caught from your parents?

I illegally park a lot. You illegally park a lot. Woo! I haven't had a ticket since last year's summer. Oh, pride comes before the fall.

You haven't... You illegally park a lot and you haven't had... Which means, actually, you've more than broken even. Like, that's how I find... That's how I... Sometimes I'm also prone to doing this. But I'm also like, if I can get away with it for 10 times, I've already broken even. So, you can charge me whatever you want. Sorry, but it's being recorded. Oh, it's being recorded. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I will pay the fine. I will pay the fine.

[18:26] Debt has to be paid. Janine, I don't think I've ever picked on you. I want to pick on you today. What did you catch from your parents?

Their heart to host. My goodness. And I can see that in you. The way you just invite people. And you were actually... Did they teach us that? Did they sit you down and say, hey, we're going to have a couple of lessons as a family on hosting?

No, you just see it. You catch it. You see it. And you just... And it follows suit. Can you see the impact that we have, that our families have on us? And it makes you think, what are the things that I've caught?

The good and the bad. What is the voice of the parent that is going on inside you? It's something to think about because we see here Isaac falling into the same traps his dad did. And it carries on. But before that, in verse 12, if something happens, okay, so the plot is gone. Rebecca is his wife. It's settled. He lies. And he gets away with it. Verse 12. And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold.

[19:30] The Lord blessed him. This challenges most Christian thinking because we think when we do something bad, then God will punish us. Correct? Things won't go well for us.

Or when some things don't go well for us, you wonder, oh, is it because I'm not reading my Bible enough? And what you see here is the same old problems come, but the same old grace always overcomes that. And so even though he lies and even though he's forced into the same generational sin that his dad does, verse 12, God still blesses him.

He blesses him 100 fold. The standard rate of that time is if they made an investment into a farm, it would have been 10 fold. Maximum 30 fold would have been a very good year.

Imagine he makes an investment and he gets a hundred times back. This would have been, people would have looked at him and gone, something's going on with this guy. No one makes an investment and gets a hundred times back.

Something's going wrong. Well, not something's going wrong. Something is different about this guy. Well, maybe not about this guy necessarily, but about his God. And so then you see the Lord blessed him and the man became rich and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.

[20:36] He had possessions of flocks, so just basically how rich he was. But then something happens. Verse 14, so that the Philistines envied him. So the moment he started getting more, envy started to creep up around from the people around him.

So they envy him. And after that, they not only envy, they actually then start sabotaging his wealth in verse 15. Now the Philistines had stopped and filled earth with all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.

Bear in mind, it's a famine. What do you really need in a famine? What do you need for human existence or life? You need water. Where do you get the water from in those kind of places? Wells. So wells are extremely important to the survival of a group of people.

And so what did the Philistines do? They envy him from far. Why is this guy getting so rich? Why is every investment he makes comes back a hundredfold? Let's slow him down a little bit. Otherwise, he's going to get too powerful. So what do they do?

In the middle of the night, they grab a group of guys and they're going to fill all his wells with dirt to stop them from having water, to sabotage his wealth. After that, verse 16, Abimelech says, you know what?

[21:38] That's enough. Go away from us for you are much mightier than we. You know what? We don't even want you in our land anymore. Why? Because you're getting too rich from our land. Go away. So they envy him. Then they sabotage. And then they actually exile him and send him away.

What is Isaac's response to all of this? Remember, this is the only chapter we have on Isaac. So we have to glean everything that we can about this man from this one chapter. So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the valley of Jerar and settled there.

And then, verse 18, he dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham. The Philistines had stopped after the death. And then he does it. But what happens when he digs that well? Verse 19, the herdsman of, verse 20, the herdsman of Jerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsman, saying, the water is ours.

So they called the name of the well, Isaac. So this happens twice. So they go. So actually, interestingly, even though he is a man of fear, because that's why he lied about his wife, throughout this journey, you start to see him building the muscle that is called faith.

So you start to see him change. And you start to see him change before your eyes. Because now there's an enemy that is trying to sabotage him, trying to push him away. But instead of fighting him, remember, Isaac is super rich.

[22:46] His dad was also super rich. And actually, he had 318 men that actually overcame a king that was ruling over five kingdoms. So his dad was a powerful man. The assumption here is that Isaac's the same.

At any moment, he could have said, why are you destroying my wells? I'm going to destroy you. I have way more power than you. Why am I even letting you do this? But he doesn't. Because I think if he went that way, it would have been the way of fear.

But instead, he chooses the way of faith. And what does he have faith in? Actually, you can do whatever you want to me. But my God is more powerful than anything that you can ever do. And I'm not afraid of you at all.

And so what does he do? He digs a well, finds water, but then they come and quarrel with him. And then they actually contend with him. So he's like, you know what? I'm going to leave it. You have that well. I'm going to call this well the well of contention.

And it's all yours. And then he goes. And he goes and finds another well. And from that level, he finds water again. And then they come and go and fight him for that. And so actually that well, he calls the well of hostility. So he's like, okay, this well of contention is all yours.

[23:46] I don't care for it. You take it. This well here, you're fighting me? Fine. You take it. You start to see this man start to build his trust in God to the point where he doesn't have to fight people anymore.

He doesn't have to lie anymore. Why? Because he knows God will ultimately give him what he needs because God promised him that in the beginning of the chapter. And so finally, they find a final well.

And he moved from there. And this time, they did not quarrel over it. So he called the name Rehoboth saying, for now the Lord has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land. There is trust. You can take my stuff. You can take my job. You can take that promotion. You can take all these things because ultimately, I have a God who is in complete control, who is sovereignly for me, who knows what I need, doesn't always give me what I want, but I'm provided for.

If you're going to fight me for it, you take it. I wonder how many of us can even carry that attitude into our workplace. Especially if you work in an area like finance, where it's a dog-eat-dog world.

[24:56] Can you be in a place where you're like, hey, everything I have comes from God anyway. And actually, even if you try to take it away from me, if God wants me to have it, he'll let me have it.

I'm not going to have to scrounge and fight and lie and be deceitful. Because why? Because God's got my back. You see, Isaac, the same man that lied about his wife, is starting to learn.

And he gets to the place where he actually finds that God provides for him. And then when God provides for him, God speaks again. I am the God of Abraham, your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.

So he builds an altar there. He gets so rich to the point where Abimelech comes back. So the guy who drove him away comes back and says to him, and he doesn't come back on his own. He comes back with Ahuhazaph, his advisor, and Fickle, the commander of his army.

Likely the same Fickle that went to Abraham in a very similar situation in chapter 20 and 21. And they come to him and Isaac's response to them is, why have you come to, this is verse 27, why have you come to me seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?

[26:08] Verse 28, we see plainly that the Lord has been with you. That is the dream. That is the prayer. That someone in your workplace, your boss who has been mistreating you, your family member who just always, always just messes with you, comes to you and says, you know what?

I can see and it's pretty clear to me that your God is with you. And whilst you chose fear at the beginning, I'm starting to see that there is worth in having faith in your God.

And so they come and so they say, hey, can we make a deal? Do you remember how we actually treated you quite well and we did no harm to you? Which is ironic. Verse 29, he says, that you will do us no harm just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace.

If I'm Isaac, I'm like, bro, you have short-term memory because you did not do me no harm. Every well I dug, you came to fill. Every time I had success, you pushed me away and you sent me into work.

And yet now you dare come to me and say, hey, do you remember how we were good friends and we were just cool with each other? Does Isaac retaliate? Does Isaac even have a snide, passive-aggressive comment?

[27:19] He does not. Why? He's growing. He's growing. He's growing in his faith. So what does he do instead? Verse 30. So he makes them a feast and they ate and drank.

I don't know. If someone does that kind of stuff to me, I don't think I'd be comfortable buying them lunch. But so often I live, a lot of my decisions are based and driven out of fear.

But if they're driven out of faith in a God who looks after me no matter what and nothing happens to me without his say-so, that then allows me to sit and stare at someone in the eye who has mistreated me and go, you know what?

Let me buy you lunch. Can you see the audacity in that? Can you see the recklessness in that almost and the mindset? That's the Christian faith starting to appear. So they have dinner.

In the morning, they rose early and exchanged those and Isaac sent them on their way and they departed from him in peace. That same day, that same day that that happened, Isaac's servants came and said, hey, we found water. And you think, wow.

[28:25] And that's pretty much it, actually. We don't hear much more from Isaac's life than that. But what you see again, the same old famine, the same old lies, the same old problems, but the same grace.

Why? Not because of Isaac, not because of Abraham, but because they had a God who was relentless and consistent and good for his promise. This whole book is not about faithful people. Those two guys both made it, Abraham and Isaac. But as we've learned, they're not really that faithful. But what we see here, even though there is generational sin, even though the same problems that we keep going back to, God keeps coming back and God keeps ruling and reigning in the same way.

So, blessings. They're not always easy. It doesn't mean we won't have famines. We do have famines. But what it does mean is another opportunity to say, will I trust in God?

Instead of escaping to my own Egypt, will I trust in God? Will I not rely on the things that I think will work, but will I trust in God because he can be trusted? The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac is actually our God too.

[29:34] Of course, we all know now, and I hope this is not a surprise to you every time we open up this book that is called The Bible, it's not really about Abraham and Isaac.

It's not really about us. It's not really about you. It's about Jesus. It's about the one who is the true Isaac, who eventually comes to fulfill all the promises through him.

The one who actually had to surrender his rights time and time again. The decision to come to earth. The decision to live among men.

The decision to be born in a stable. The decision to be born to a carpenter. The decision to be born in Nazareth. The decision to be nailed onto a cross for something that you did not do.

Relinquishing his rights so that we would have life. The shepherd in Psalm 23, 5, it kind of pays tribute to this story here.

[30:44] What does it say? You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. That's what Isaac got to do. He had enemies come to him.

He's like, you know what? I'm not afraid of you. You can come and sit at my table. Why? Because I'm not even the host. Who's the host? God. And the very fact that you can sit here, the very fact that I can sit here is not because of us, it's because of him.

So Psalm 23, when it says, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, it's saying, God is relaxed and God is in control and God has sat down and he's prepared the table. He says, come and sit down. That anxiety that you have about work, that anxiety you have about, that fear you have about this, come, child, take a seat.

I've prepared a table. We should eat. That faith, that faith that allows us to live in a way really comes from Jesus.

Jesus, Jesus, when he starts his first ever sermon in Matthew 5, he said, blessed are those who are the peacemakers, they are the sons of God. And he himself was the ultimate peacemaker.

[31:53] Ephesians 2 talks about this, that we were hostile to him and yet he came to preach peace to those who were near, peace to those who were far off, to bring them together, to bring us all together so that we would all have access to the Father through him, the ultimate, the son of God himself.

Then we have to turn that around to ourselves and go, well, okay, well, if we're children of God, are we peacemakers? Can we invite enemies to our table and sit and say, hey, let me buy you lunch. You've been mistreating me.

You've been stabbing me behind my back. And guess what I know? I'm not stupid. I'm just not afraid of you because my God is bigger than whatever you're trying to do.

Why? Because Jesus. Because I'm trying to follow the true Isaac. I'm trying to follow the shepherd who prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

Keller, in his book, I've been reading this called Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering. We're trying to make sense of everything bad that's happening in this world. It says this, Isaac surrendered his rights to the wells again and again, choosing peace over retaliation.

[33:02] In doing so, he demonstrated that he believed God's promise was greater than his immediate defense. True peacemaking is not weakness. It is the ultimate expression of faith that God is your vindicator.

Imagine that if we left today carrying that spirit into every fight that we have, into every job that we have. But God is for us and not against us.

Tozer, in the pursuit of God, says we must be convinced that God is able to provide for us in the presence of our enemies. The table he prepares for us in Psalm 23 is set right in the sight of those who oppose us. You do not need to fight for a seat when God himself is the host.

I think more often than not, we fight for seats for ourselves. We fight for those wells. We fight for those things. And all that indicates to us is we have forgotten how faithful and how in control God truly is.

I'm actually going to stop here now for a second because I'm going to invite a friend up to talk because I don't want you guys to fall asleep. And it's this actually, I asked Gabs to reflect on these last two chapters that we've been going through really to think about what are the general rational things that we've passed and we've been passed on, we've received from our families.

[34:24] What are the things that we're still facing almost because of that? And how's God showing up through all of those things? So Gabs, come on. Should we give him a round of applause? A little bit about Gabs as you'll be able to hear.

He's also from England. England. England. He's from a very obnoxious city called London. London. And actually, I first get, you're just going to repeat everything I say.

I am. That's my job. And actually, I first met Gabs when we worked at Young Life together. So he, actually, you can say, why are you here in Hong Kong? Because God called me here.

Yeah, in a grand sense, yes. But originally, why don't you look at my stuff? Oh my goodness. So originally, I came here on exchange.

I was at Hong Kong U. I did one year here. I had a really pivotal experience of community when I came on exchange.

[35:32] I grew up as a Christian, but I think it was my experience of community on exchange here that gave me a bigger sense of God. So when I went back to the UK to finish my degree, there was

always a sense in my heart that I wanted to be back around those people that I experienced that community with.

So when I graduated, I came back and I actually was working with Young Life for five years. And yeah, that was kind of why I came back and kind of, since then, it's now been 10 years, which is kind of crazy to think.

And what do you do now? So I'm a, I do events. I do financial events. So after working for Young Life for five years, there was a sort of a transition period and I moved into sort of the corporate world now.

And a part of that calling was I remember feeling like a lot of the guys who I was discipling and walking with, a lot of them I knew weren't going to go into full-time ministry. And I felt like I had this conviction in my heart where I wanted to give them an image of someone who was pursuing Christ who wasn't in full-time ministry.

So that was actually really the reason. And yes, I've had a chance to practice that and it's been difficult. It's been very tough and James knows it's been quite tough for me, but yeah, that was kind of the heart.

[36:45] I mean, I resonate with that. Sometimes when you're in full-time ministry as a pastor, you try and convince, hey, let's be serious about the faith. Let's read the Bible. Let's do this and this is what I'm doing. And sometimes it's like, well, that's okay for you. You're a pastor.

And I'm like, no, I wasn't always a pastor. I wasn't born a pastor. But so that's your calling. You came out and how's that working out for you? Yeah, it's been tough. It's been tough, but it's been good. I think in a really interesting way, being in this space I've been in for the past four years since I left full-time ministry has made me have to rely on God in a different way.

I think the hardships that I've faced, which in the grand scheme of life aren't hardships, but relative to my experience that God knows me, these are hardships. I think they've just given me reason and opportunities to fully rely on Him and just be like, I can't do this.

And it's only by God's strength I'm able to make it through right now. So I think that's actually been really good for my faith. That's good. And I asked you to look at actually Genesis 25 and 26 and just as you mull over that transition from Abraham to Isaac and start sharing.

What came out for you? Before I go into it, can I pray? Lord, this is all about you.

[38:04] Jesus, we thank you for the sacrifice that you've made for us. Truly, everything that we say and that we do, we want it to reflect your goodness and your glory in our lives.

Lord, this sharing isn't about me, it's not about my mom, it's not about my family, it's about your goodness. Lord, I pray that the words that are spoken, Lord, would it be empowered by your Holy Spirit and would the exact thing that needs to be received for your children, for your congregation, Lord?

Would it be spoken to the hearts, the people in this room and the people listening? In Jesus Christ's name, amen. Amen. Thank you. So yeah, so over Genesis 25 and 26, I think one of the biggest themes I can see is dysfunction.

It's dysfunction in family, it's brokenness in family, it's lying, it's cheating, it's self-preservation, and despite all of this, there's the reality that we see that we know that this is the family that God has chosen to bring his glory through and for them to be a blessing to all of the generations.

Like it says at the beginning of Genesis 26, the purpose of God being with Isaac and the line of Isaac is so that many, the multitudes, the generations, the world, not just their family would be blessed.

[39:32] So as I see the dysfunction over the past two chapters, I'm also seeing, wow, God's provision, God's providence, God's goodness, his faithfulness is consistent, is persistent through all of this.

So yeah, I know, I ended up thinking about my own family and I guess it was really timely because over the last couple of weeks, there's just been a lot of opportunities.

I've come face to face with the dysfunction of my own family, you know, and just seeing oh wow, there is so much brokenness in the world but like here, right here. And I'm sure many of us can resonate with that.

So yeah, recently there was just, I guess, jumping forward a bit. The tension in my family really comes down to my grandma and my mother.

So in that relationship, there's a lot of hurt, there's a lot of brokenness. And it stems from things that even started when my grandma was a young woman.

[40:33] You know, my grandma got married to my grandpa when she was 14. And even there, he had multiple wives. And there was so much brokenness in that original relationship between the two of them.

My mom is the firstborn of my grandma. So much of that pain went into my mom. And to this day, there's been just so much tension and dysfunction between the two of them because of that original time.

My mom is the oldest of four. And then, long story short, my grandma and my grandpa split. They both moved to the UK. My mom has a lot of half-sisters and half-brothers.

Even within those relationships, the brokenness continues. The dysfunction continues. There's favoritism. There's lying. There's deceit. And I've just seen recently, because my grandma did pass a week ago, actually.

So there was a big situation that happened leading up to this where she had a really, really progressive and sudden battle of cancer within two months. She was healthy, two months, and then she passed away.

[41:43] And my mom and my grandma had not spoken on good terms, let's say, for maybe 15 years. And I remember, I grew up going to my grandma's house and it was actually a really joyful space.

And then I remember at some point in my childhood, it was like, oh, that just stopped. And I didn't know why, but I just remember, it was like, okay, we don't go to grandma's house anymore. We don't talk to, like, all of these uncles and all of these aunties anymore.

And I've gotten older, I've had conversations with my mom where I've been able to understand why that happened. And yeah, it's, like I said, it's rooted in all of just this, oh, I don't believe you have my best interests at heart.

I think you've done something to cause the pain in my life. The decisions that you've made have not been the decisions I want you to make. So now, we are at odds. We are enemies.

And this is within the family, right? And then this trickled down to my aunties and uncles. I find it, I mean, we actually hadn't planned this week to be, we actually planned before. So I'm sat here just going, okay, well, we both had loss, experienced loss this week.

[42:54] We both come from families that are dysfunctional. And it's so in, just in line with what we're reading in scripture. Like the same things you just described about your family.

Like, well, we covered all of those in the last few chapters. Like, so as you relate to scripture and the word of God, what things come to mind for you? Yeah.

So you may have heard me talk about my mom before. My mom is a wonderful lady. She's a flawed woman as well. Very flawed. But she's a wonderful woman.

And the reason I emphasize those two things is because I genuinely do that throughout the two chapters, 25 and 26, and all of Genesis so far.

The emphasis is once again that the faithfulness of God isn't dependent on humanity. Even within the flaws of humanity, even within the brokenness of humanity, the faithfulness of God is consistent.

[43:49] And I see that in my mom because with all of that context I just gave you, which is very brief, my mom is a person who has dedicated her life to Christ.

She met Christ in her teenage, in her teenage years and, like, by herself. And I believe that Christ has been an anchor for my mom. And one thing that I've seen in my mother is that she has demonstrated this willingness to be malleable to God.

And that's actually something she's prayed. And this is a prayer I've heard her pray. I've heard her, you know, on her knees with her hands out saying, Lord, let me be malleable to your spirit. And what I have seen in that is that in all of these moments where I feel like this brokenness and dysfunction could manifest, I've seen that similar to the way you mentioned that Isaac in the latter half of 26, he's now in this place where he's beginning to put his trust in God over his fear of man. I think as I've grown and as I've, you know, grown and seen my mom grow in her own faith, I've seen that same thing happen with her where as she's prayed to be malleable to the spirit, I've seen that the Lord has been faithful to that and that she's changed.

My mom's very fiery. If you ever meet my mom, she will probably, like, prophesy over you and then pray for you even if you don't welcome it. She's that type of person. But all of it is really rooted in the

Lord has been my mom's anchor.

[45 : 18] That's it. Everything else my mom has felt like has failed her in a way and the Lord has been her anchor. So that's why she holds onto her faith so strongly. But at the same time, she's so quick to be humble.

She's so quick to accept fault. She's so quick to recognize where she has done something that maybe has grieved the Holy Spirit in her. And that's something I've heard her say, like, Lord, forgive me for the things that I've done that I've grieved your spirit within me.

She's quick to recognize those things, even with us as kids. Like, she would say something to us, she would punish us or something, and then she would be quick to recognize that this was coming from herself. And this wasn't coming from the Lord using through her.

So she was so sensitive to that. So I don't know, as I've looked at that transition or that growth of Isaac, I feel like that's kind of what I've recognized in people in my own life within my mother as well.

And just, I wonder how common that is, especially if you've grown up in the Chinese culture, when was the last time you heard your parents kind of rebuke you and then say, you know what? I overstepped the mark and I apologize.

[46 : 19] Has anyone ever had a Chinese parent apologize to them for anything? But, of course, what we're talking about is just this humility that she's developed whilst being fierce, which is very possible, but that's the key to all of it, right?

Right. And like I said, with that context I gave you about my mother, I think it would have been very expected for her to not be like that. It would have been very expected for her to be very harsh, to be very jaded, to carry that hurt in our relationship with us.

But I genuinely believe that the only, only reason that she is not like that is because of Christ in her. because she has been willing to surrender herself fully to God and her fear of the Lord overrides her sense of self, that she's been able to take every, all of those generational traumas and generational dysfunction that could have been passed on to us and say, this isn't what the Lord has for my family.

And so I'm going to turn that on you. As you look at your family from grandma down to mom and the whole wider family, so Scabs is someone who's actually very reflective and very insightful in his own kind of, just where he is.

As you think about the things that you may have inherited from the dysfunction, how do you go about surrendering and letting God, you know, mold you?

[47 : 56] I think it really comes down to what my, I've seen in my mom, what I've seen her demonstrate that I've caught is a willingness to recognize the power and authority of God and to be changed by that.

I think my mom is in awe of God. I haven't always been in awe of God and I would say in a large extent I'm still learning what that means.

But that's something I see her practice and because of that, I know that God, and through my own experiences as well where I've now seen God show up in my own life and his faithfulness in my own life, I know that he is worthy of our praise.

So in that, I think there's this journey of recognizing that if there is something that is of God's heart and I feel like I am missing something, I try my best, whether it's in surrounding myself with the people who can give me good counsel, whether it's just spending time in the world, to be realigned with God's heart.

Because I almost, almost assume that I'm missing something in a way. So I'm like, God, I don't see the full picture and I know I don't see the full picture. I want to see the full picture. So I think that's kind of something that I've gained from my mom where it's like quick to minimize self and to maximize God in that experience and say like, God, what is actually your heart right now?

[49 : 26] And so that's something good that you've taken from it. What are some of the challenges that have come from? Oh, there's a lot I can go into actually.

For the sake of this, I think one of the things that my mom used to say is, and I've told some people this, my mom is quite dramatic and she would say, Gabriel, you have no friends.

You only have brothers and sisters in Christ and acquaintances. Oh. Yeah. Right, right, right. So it's quite dramatic and I think in a lot of ways, that is actually why in some ways I've been quite, what's the word I want to use?

Independent and I like go off. People who know me well know I do this. Well, I'm just like kind of to myself a lot because it's just like, no one understands me, only God understands me. And I'm just like, I'm in this by myself, got no friends.

So I think, so I think there's like a side of that where I, the heart behind what my mom was saying is really good. But I think in reality, I think sometimes it's manifest in this sort of like, no one will fully understand I'm by myself in this, so I need to face this by myself with God and no one else.

[50:49] So I would say that's kind of like the flip side. That's interesting. Wow, your mom sounds like Vin Diesel. Okay. In that exact voice. What's the final reflection from just the word of God for you?

Yeah. So I actually, I had a call with my mom before I was going to come up today because I was going to share this story about her, so I wanted to get her one permission. But also I asked her directly to say, what do you have for the congregation?

Like what's actually something that you would want me to share with the church this Sunday? And her words were, one, being malleable to the Holy Spirit. believing that if God is who he says he is, any of the changes that he is calling you to make and any of the changes that he is encouraging in your life are worth it.

Be open to those, be surrendered to that. The second thing that my mom wanted to share was the word forgiveness. I didn't go into it too much, but very quickly, just before my grandma passed, my, like I said, my mom and my grandma hadn't spoken for many, many years.

She knew, well, my mom didn't even know at this point, but she knew my grandma was sick and she felt the conviction to say, hey, I really need to see her. So she called her siblings.

[52:08] Her siblings were hanging up the call. They weren't picking up. She found out through one of her other sisters who still talks to her where my grandma was, went to see my grandma.

She gets to the location. Some of her siblings are there. They're shouting at her, telling her to get out. I can tell you more about the story, but just for a bit of context, the reason that there is tension isn't because of something bad that my mom did.

It's really just because of jealousy. But my mom gets to the location of my grandma. They're screaming, telling her to get out. My mom gets a chance to kneel beside my grandma.

And at this point, my grandma's nonverbal. She's not able to speak. She holds her hand. She prays with her. She says, this is your firstborn daughter. I love you. She tells me that that whole journey going up to see her grandma again, she was crying and she had so much pain in her heart.

She gets into that room and then she gets on her knees and prays. And after 15 years, she feels her mother squeeze her hand.

[53:27] And in the background, her siblings are still showering her to get out. But she feels her mother squeeze her hand. And then after praying and kneeling next to her, saying, I forgive you, she leaves.

My grandma passes away three days later. And this story is unresolved in the sense that my mom, in her faith and in her understanding, believes that between her and her mother, the Lord has restored that.

there's still a lot of unreconciled feelings and relationships with her siblings now to this day. It's still ongoing. But my mom's take is forgiveness.

And it's not forgiveness because the hurt isn't real. It's not forgiveness because the other person deserves it. But it's forgiveness because we, what first have been forgiven, that God doesn't hold the things that we have done against us.

That he sent his son to die on our behalf despite all that we have done, despite brokenness, despite the dysfunction, that he sent his son to die on our behalf so that the slate is wiped clean.

[54:39] So because of that, we are free to forgive. And that's the only reason we are free to forgive. So that was the word that my mom wanted to share with us today.

That the forgiveness that we have isn't because of us, it's because of him. Yeah. So we ought to forgive. That's good. Thank you. Can you pray for us? Yeah. Lord, we thank you for your resilient and perfect faithfulness, Lord.

We thank you that this is not about us. This is not about my mother. This is not about us being able to be faithful to you or us knowing the tricks of being a Christian or the tricks of walking with you.

It's not about that, Lord. It's simply about your goodness, Lord, and your faithfulness towards your people. Simply about your desire to be near to your creation, Lord, and for us to experience your

fullness.

So, Father, even right now, as I pray for our congregation and I pray for the things that may have stirred in the hearts of people listening, Lord, Lord, I pray that you would speak your peace.

[55:54] You would speak your shalom into those who are facing dysfunction, pain, hurt, difficulty to forgive, Lord, any of these feelings, Lord, that are being carried by our flesh, Lord, I pray that you speak your shalom over those in Jesus' name.

Father, I thank you that as we look at ourselves, we look at it through your lens. Lord, so we don't actually have to look at ourselves in the brokenness, Lord, but we can look at ourselves as redeemed.

So, Father, as we go forward, Lord, and as we navigate the real hurt and the real dysfunction in our lives and our family, Lord, would you firstly show us what it means to be malleable to your spirit?

Lord, allow us to be changed by your spirit, Lord. May we not be so stubborn in our ways that we cannot be molded by you. And Lord, would you also show us what it means to forgive as we have been forgiven?

Lord, allow us to be free to forgive because you've already taken the ultimate offense on our behalf and you now say that we are free and free indeed. So, we pray this in your Son, Jesus Christ's name.

[57:05] Amen. Thank you, Gav. Round of applause. Round of applause for you. Thank you. Let me attempt to summarize but really with the whole heart let us be malleable to his spirit now.

We've gone through a lot, we've talked a lot and I'm not going to stand here and pretend that I know every single person's family and all the dysfunction that exists and everybody, you know your family and most importantly God knows your family.

So, can I just lead us in a moment of just reflection? You can close your eyes, you can bow your head, you can look around, you can do whatever it is that you feel comfortable but what I hope you saw here is two brothers who are deeply flawed but just blessed and in awe that God's word would pop out to us in such a timely way and that's why Genesis, that's why the Bible even though it can be dry, even though it can look like the same stuff it's just it's just incisive in speaking life into our times.

So, whether it's we're holding grief and blessing hand in hand so whether it's us facing famine in our own lives right now.

So, whether it be fearful of man to the point that we would lie or whether we feel convicted that actually we've not been acting in the way that we should or whether it's processing and making sense of why the Lord would still bless us even in our deceit and our lie.

[59:04] Whether it's this journey of growing to choose faith over fear choosing to relinquish our rights choosing the way of peace and whether it's acknowledging and articulating and confessing the generational sins that we have inherited the mindsets that we've taken in Holy Spirit we are malleable to you would you speak would you work would you clean would you purify I'll finish with two quotes much better than mine Francis Schaeffer says this the curse was broken at Calvary and the patterns must be broken in our daily walk

Christ bore the guilt of our generational sins on the cross so that we might walk in the power of his new creation and John Tyson says this you are not bound to repeat the history of your earthly ancestors when you have been adopted into the family of God in Christ your true lineage changes and the generational chain of sin is broken at the cross the one message from today is we may face the same old problems and same old dysfunction but the same old God of the same old grace keeps washing over us time and time again the God of Abraham was the God of Isaac was the God of Jacob was the God of Natalie and Aaron and the God of Brenda the God of Emily the God of Joshua the God of Erica the God of Julian the God of Jackie the God of Agnes the God of Fonita the God of Anthony the God of Connie the God of Benny the same God and the same grace may may may