

The Do-It-Yourself Disaster

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Date: 05 July 2026

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[0:00] Yeah, I really love what Jay shared, especially at the end there of, hey, we're all Christian something.! As Jay was sharing about how Christian surfers started, it actually reminded me a lot about what Aaron shared about Young Life, or the history of Young Life, where the founder just saw kids across the street outside the church and wanted to go where the kids were.

So I think that's an encouragement for us. Not all of us are surfers, but we all have hobbies, we all have communities, and the question for us is, hey, where has God placed us?

And can we see the loss? Can we see that the harvest is plentiful and be one of those harvesters, one of the workers, and pray for God to send out more laborers into the field?

So yeah, where has God placed you? Let's go and make disciples there. Okay? But yeah, speaking of Aaron, he's not just the director of Young Life. I learned recently that Aaron also is a coach for a personality test.

So Jojo got me a personality test for my birthday one year, and recently Aaron and I just sat down and went through that personality test. And I'm generally not a fan of personality test, but I found actually this one was quite helpful, very insightful, so thanks Aaron for that.

[1:21] There's some things that I found surprising and made me think, but there's some things that were really, that I already knew about myself, that were really obvious. And one of those things is that I really like to do things, I like to take action.

I like to problem solve and find solutions. I'm an engineer by training, I'm an engineer by heart, and I really like working on a DIY do-it-yourself project.

I really like those. Like finding a scrappy, creative way to get something done. I see a problem, I want to solve it. So for example, you know, it's hot recently, we got a few new AC units, and those, the exhaust vents, it wouldn't really fit in the window.

That was my DIY project. I just cut out some cardboard, the cardboard box that the AC came in, and that's our exhaust vent. So you'll see there's some cardboard around the corner there. There's something satisfying about just doing it yourself.

And I can even appreciate Darren, he has like a 3D printer, and our, the lamp's upstairs on the 14th floor. One time the bulb, like the lamp shape broke, and he just printed it out, and you couldn't even tell.

[2:31] So I really like a good DIY project. I can appreciate just getting it done. And yeah, there's nothing bad about doing the work. We read in Genesis 1-2 that work is a good thing created by God.

It is designed by God. But it's a problem when we take the same do-it-yourself mindset, fix-it-myself mindset, and apply it to taking hold of the promises of God.

When we listen, when we hear the promises of God, and we have this mindset of, I'm going to do it myself. I'm going to seize it for myself. I'm going to take action and realize it, make the promises of God happen for myself.

To stress and scheme and strive by our own strength without fixing our eyes on God. So last week, we read Genesis 15, where God made a covenant with Abram, promised him that he would have his own son, born from his own flesh.

And we read that Abram had faith. Abram believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. We also read last week that Abram had questions in his waiting. He had anxieties, doubts, gaps between his faith and how he feels in his circumstances.

[3:45] And we read last week that the good news of our salvation is that it depends not on the strength of our faith, but simply on the strength of the one who we put our faith in. The strength of Christ.

His power to save us. His blood. That's what we read last week. And now today, in Genesis 16, we see a bit more clearly these gaps in Abram's faith.

Because some time has passed since God's promise, since God made his covenant with Abram. We don't know exactly how long. Maybe several years has passed. But now, Abram and his wife Sarai are getting a bit tired of waiting.

They have God's promises, but they're getting tired of waiting. They begin to waver. They look at Sarah's barrenness, that they have no child, and decide that it's time to take matters into their own hands, to do it themselves, to DIY it, and realize God's promise by their own strength.

And this is what we'll see today. That God doesn't need our striving to fulfill his promises. He doesn't need us stressing out and scheming for him to keep his word. And there's nothing about taking action and working with God in faith.

[4:57] But when we anxiously try to do it ourselves, to take shortcuts in God's plan, seize God's promises on our own, then we find it always leads to disaster.

And so we're going to read Genesis 16 together. Let's please stand as we read the word of the Lord together from Genesis chapter 16. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.

And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.

And he went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, May the wrong done to me be on you.

[6:00] I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me. But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your servant is in your power.

Do to her as you please. Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found her by spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going? She said, I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai. The angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress and submit to her.

The angel of the Lord also said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him. And he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.

[7:00] So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing. For she said, Truly here I have seen him who looks after me. Therefore the well was called Bir Lahai Roy.

It lies between Kadesh and Barad. And Hagar bore Abram a son. And Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore Ishmael. And Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. And so again, in the previous chapter, the Lord promised Abram a child, more descendants than he could count, like counting the stars in the sky. That's what God said. If you can count the stars in the sky, so shall your offspring be. And we were reminded last week of the certainty of the promises of God. But here in verse one, we snap back to reality, or at least we snap back to our circumstances, what we see about our reality.

Abram is promised a child, but verse one reminds us here. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. On one hand, we have that promise, but on the other hand, still no children.

[8:08] Some time has passed since that promise, but they're still waiting. And who here loves to wait? Who here likes waiting in line? Who likes, who hopes for their Taobao order to come two weeks late?

Or who wants that dopamine hit six months later? Waiting is not a new problem. Abram had to wait. But I think more and more recently, we crave this instant gratification, what we want to come now.

I feel that myself. Every time I order something, I'm always refreshing, waiting for when I can ship the consolidation from the warehouse. And yeah, tech companies are targeting our attention spans, short foreign content, to get us to keep scrolling endlessly.

It's getting harder and harder to wait. But waiting is not a new problem. And in the waiting and the delay, that's when we're tempted often to do it ourselves and take control of the situation.

This is how Abram and Sarai felt. They've been waiting for years, heartbroken for years. In verse one, and Sarai said to Abram, behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.

[9:24] That's how Sarai felt in the wait. Notice what Sarai says. She doesn't say, the Lord hasn't yet given me a child. She says, he prevented me from having a child.

And Sarai's not only stating this theological truth about God's sovereignty, that God is in control and he hasn't given me a child.

She's in a way also filing a complaint against the Lord, against God's providence, saying you promised us a son, but where is he? It's been years and I don't see anything.

The Lord has prevented me from having a child. And I find that quite relatable when there's something that I want, that I've prayed for, but God doesn't answer immediately or in the timeline that I want and I need to wait.

Or he says no to that. It can lead to confusion or disillusionment. God, what are you doing in this situation? Or even bitterness. God, why are you doing this to me?

[10:24] And that's perhaps what Abram and Sarai felt. They're losing hope in God's providence. And they saw the wait, they saw this delay and they were tempted to take action and do something for themselves.

And this is what they're tempted to do. Sarai had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And verse two, and Sarai said to Abram, behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.

Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as wife.

Okay. Pause here. Did you guys hear what she said? Because I think this plan is just insane to me. It sounds crazy to me. Because this is what Sarai schemes up. She says this.

She says, Hi Abram, my husband. You know, I can't have kids. I'm 75 years old. But I have this young domestic helper, Hagar.

[11:30] She's younger, more fertile. So how about this tonight? You take, I'll take the couch, I'll sleep on the couch, you take her to bed, you two do your thing.

And not just tonight, but you can actually take her as your second wife. And this is how we'll have a child. This is Sarai's plan to have a child.

And to all the ladies in the room, for all the wives, imagine saying that. Imagine saying that to your husband. Imagine the jealousy, the competition that would bring, the heartbreak, the brokenness, the desperation.

Imagine saying that. It sounds crazy to us. It feels crazy. We only, we can, we can know, we know that this will lead to trouble. But, to them, in their culture, in their time, this was actually a totally accepted custom.

In Abram's time, this was actually standard procedure in a marriage. Children are important to us now. Having children are important. And it can be heartbreaking. Now, waiting for a child, wanting a child, not getting a child.

[12:43] That can be heartbreaking. But in their time, they value children even more. Having children was absolutely essential. More than anything, their culture valued continuing the family line.

That was also a way of survival. Having children to carry on your name was a non-negotiable. And it was actually the responsibility for the wife in a marriage to bear children for the husband.

And so much so that what Sarai is proposing was actually written in some marriage contracts. We have an example of that in Mesopotamia saying that in one marriage contract that if the wife is able to bear children, then the husband is not allowed to take another wife if the wife can bear children. But if the wife fails to bear children, she cannot bear children, then in the marriage contract it says the husband is allowed to take another slave girl like Hagar as a concubine as a second wife and then that slave's children will be considered the first wife's children.

That was the custom of the time. That was the agreement written in the marriage contract in their culture. So actually Sarah's proposal is crazy to us but would be commonplace in their culture for Abram to take Hagar to have children and bear children for both Abram and Sarai.

[14:05] And so their do-it-yourself scheme would have surprised no one in their culture. And that makes me think for us what do we find acceptable in our culture that is actually revolting, disturbing in the eyes of God?

What are some things that are commonplace to us that we don't even bat an eye at but God knows will surely kill us that will lead to destruction? The problem isn't as much that Abram and Sarai took action here but also that they took action contrary, opposed to what God has revealed.

They were following the course of this world, Ephesians 2, following the prince of the power of the air. They're following, carrying out the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind by nature, children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

They were following the culture, following what the rest of the world was doing. Have we? Because we're swimming in our culture. Are we following the course of this world? Are we looking to our culture's way, this world's way, rather than God's way?

Our way, not God's way. Are we tempted, maybe, to compromise our integrity because everyone around us says half-truths? Everyone cheats on their exams. Everyone exaggerates on their CVs.

[15:24] We're not lying. I'm just embellishing the truth. That's what people do in sales. Everyone does it. It's commonplace. Or like Abram, are we tempted to compromise on God's design for marriage and sexuality?

I've waited for so long. I've tried following Jesus, but the clock is ticking. I'm going to date my way. I'm going to build my family my way. Everyone sees sex this way. Everyone sees marriage this way. So what right do we have to say otherwise? In Abram's culture, this was totally accepted, expected even for him to take Hagar. But Jesus says, have you not read that he who created them made them male and female and said, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

So we know what Abram and Sarai did is against God's design. And we see this in even how this chapter is written. Because in these verses we see echoes of Genesis 3.

It's echoing the fall of man again. They're falling again here. Remember, Eve in Genesis 3 saw that the fruit was good to eat. Sarai saw that she was barren.

[16:34] Eve took the fruit and gave it to Abram, her husband. Here in verse 3, Sarai took Hagar and gave her to Abram. Genesis 3.17, God accused Adam, you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree.

And here in verse 2, Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. There's echoes of Genesis 3. That they are transgressing, disobeying God's word.

Abram and Sarai, they had the promises of God, but they looked at the weight, they saw the delay, and they took the bait. They did it their own way.

And here's the problem with doing it our own way. Taking shortcuts through God's plans always leads to disaster, always leaves a bigger mess. It doesn't end well when we ignore the designers, the creators' instructions, and use our own wisdom doing it our way.

I learned this the hard way one time in university. My roommates and I, we had a dishwasher. We don't have dishwashers in Hong Kong, but you guys know what dishwashers are? We loaded up the dishwasher, but then we realized that we didn't have any dishwasher soap.

[17:48] We realized we didn't have any dishwasher soap. So we could go to the store, walk to the store, and buy some, but it was like a 10-minute walk away, 20-minute walk, I don't know. Then I thought, we have regular dish soap, the one you use with the sponge.

So why don't I just take this pump bottle from beside the sink, squeeze it into the dishwasher?

What's the big deal? Soap is soap. Soap is soap, right? It's just soap. And the big deal is, we turned it on for a bit, and you would not believe how many bubbles came out.

It was some turbocharged bubble scene. If you guys have a dishwasher at home, try it once for fun, but it's so many bubbles. I can't explain how many bubbles there are.

There's bubbles everywhere, foam everywhere. It's all a mess. And it turns out that dishwashers are designed, they are created to use dishwasher soap for a reason.

When we neglect the design, when we think we know better, we substitute our own way. the result is bubbles, lots of bubbles. And so it is with Abram here.

[18:54] And because the disaster also doesn't even begin in this chapter. Remember, in Genesis chapter 12, or here, the passage emphasizes Hagar was an Egyptian, right?

In verse 1, we see, it says that Sarai had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And in verse 3, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.

And remember, when did we hear about Egypt? It was all the way back in chapter 12, when Abram and Sarai, they decided to do it themselves and take a detour to Egypt, out of the promised land to Egypt.

And remember, they planned and schemed that Abram would sell out his wife, Sarai, to Pharaoh.

Sarai would just tell Pharaoh, I'm just his sister, so that Pharaoh wouldn't kill Abram.

But God, and that didn't work out, of course, but God redeemed the situation, and Abram and Sarai, they left Egypt with many possessions. Where do you think they got an Egyptian servant?

[19:57] Where do you think they, when do you think Hagar came along for the ride here?

Probably back in Genesis 12. When their plans to do it themselves, do it their way, one spiritual shortcut leads to the next.

One thing led to another. And so in verse 4 here, Abram went into Hagar and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. To no one's surprise, when you tell your husband to marry another woman, it will lead to jealousy and comparison, contempt and bitterness.

And that's because, again, God has a design for marriage, a good purpose for marriage. One man, one woman for life. And it never ends well in the Bible when people take multiple wives.

This always leads to conflict. But Abram did it. And Hagar looked with contempt on Sarai. She looked down upon Sarai. Hagar antagonized Sarai.

It was Sarai's duty and responsibility. This was their culture. Sarai had responsibility to bear children for Abram. But she failed.

[21:05] And now this pretty young thing who was Sarai's servant. Sheik is able to give to Abram what Sarai never could. Imagine the jealousy Sarai must have felt.

How it strikes to her identity, her self-worth as a woman. And especially so if Hagar is egging her on, is rubbing it in her face.

And so, the result is that Sarai lashes out first at Abram in verse 5. May the wrong done to me be on you. I gave my servant to your embrace, but when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt.

May the Lord judge between you and me. Look at Sarai. Sarai's shifting the blame here. Like in Genesis 3. Eve shifts the blame. The servant deceived me. I ate. Adam blames God. The woman you gave to me.

She gave me the fruit and I ate. And here Sarai says, I gave you Hagar. This was my idea, but this is your fault, Abram. Sarai's shifting the blame. And Abram responds in verse 6.

[22:05] Behold, your servant is in your power. Do to her as you please. Once again here, Abram is passive. He fails in his responsibility to lead Sarai just like Adam failed with Eve.

Remember here, Hagar is his wife. It says that Sarai gave to Abram her husband as a wife. Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a wife.

Hagar is his wife and not just his wife, but his pregnant wife. Carrying the child that Abram had been longing for and waiting for. But look how he refers to Hagar.

He calls her Sarai's servant. Do with your servant what you please. Not his pregnant wife, but Sarai's servant. He shrugs and just tells Sarah. She's your problem. Do with her whatever you want.

And the result is Sarai dealt harshly with her and Hagar fled from her. What a mess. What a mess. Sarai was barren and we can empathize with her.

[23:08] She was understandably heartbroken. Understandably impatient. But we also see the tragedy, the futility of her actions.

She wanted a kid, but all she got was contempt. She wanted a child. She just got conflict. It's often the case. Hurt people hurt people. And Sarai lashed out at Hagar.

The result was Hagar running away. Pregnant Hagar. Caring who, to their knowledge, could be the son promised to Abram. The child of promise. That's what they might have been thinking.

But now she's gone. The child is gone. The one they've been waiting so long for. None of this. Their plans, their do-it-yourself plans weren't really well thought out.

They saw the problem but not really the end to the solution. Think about the times that we're tempted to do it ourselves. To scheme according to our own designs. to substitute dish soap for dishwasher soap.

[24 : 08] Maybe stay on the topic of marriage and dating. Is there someone that you're talking to that you know you have no business talking to? They make you feel good. But what's the plan? What's the end goal? It might start with high but maybe it ends your marriage.

Or for those dating, looking to marriage. You're thinking maybe it's true that there's fewer and fewer people to pick from within the church. And it seems like there's fewer and fewer the more you wait. The more time goes by. It's less and less likely. But if we say that Jesus is Lord then what are we doing with someone who says Jesus is a myth?

How can we deny ourselves pick up our cross and follow him while also following someone in the opposite direction? When we're tempted to do it our way, Genesis 16 reminds us it always leaves a mess.

We also see later in verse 16 Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. And spoiler alert, if we skip forward to chapter 21, we see that God's plan was not for the promise to come through Ishmael.

[25 : 18] But God's plan was for Sarai to bear a son for Abram whose name is Isaac. And when that happens, Abraham is at the ripe old age of 100.

He's 86 now. He's 100 years old later. 14 years later, that's when Isaac comes. And we don't know when Isaac would have come otherwise. But one commentator says that in the perspective of Genesis, it emerges that Ishmael's birth was a diversion.

Sarah's anxiety to have a child seems to have delayed the promise's fulfillment some 14 years. So in the rush, in their, when they got tired of waiting, they took action.

And maybe they actually delayed the fulfillment of God's promise by 14 years. It's hard to wait, but it's even harder to wait another 14 years. Obedience to God never means missing out.

Doing it ourself just makes a mess. We can trust by faith that God's plan for us is good. And right now, Hagar is caught right in the middle of that mess.

[26 : 25] Abram and Sarah's shortcut has left her pregnant and mistreated and she also takes matters into her own hands too. She flees and she's running for her life into the wilderness. And that is where the Lord meets her.

We read in verse 7, the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. The angel of the Lord, who is either the presence of the Lord or a messenger of the Lord, appears to Hagar.

And now here, we see that the Lord both convicts Hagar and also comforts her. He calls to her, Hagar, the servant of Sarai. The Lord, he dignifies Hagar by calling her her name.

But he also reminds her of her responsibility. She is Sarai's servant and she's running away from her. And he convicts her. Hagar, servant of Sarai, return to your mistress and submit to her.

Turn around, return to Sarai. This is a tough word. This is tough because Sarai had been harsh with Hagar. But God tells her, turn around, return. That's what you're meant to do.

[27 : 26] And now, this might raise some eyebrows for us. Is God telling Hagar to stay in a toxic environment? Is that what God wants for us? I think we shouldn't over-apply what God says to Hagar into situations today.

Maybe situations of abuse today. This is a historical account of a specific household in conflict. God has a specific instruction for them.

Hagar was a servant who had contempt for her mistress, contempt for Sarai, who tried to take Sarai's position. And Sarai retaliated with discipline, with being harsh, maybe too harsh.

But Hagar is also out in the wilderness all alone. And God is telling Hagar to return to the safety of Abram's household. Abram, who has the promises of God, and to repent of her contempt, repent of her pride, laid that down and submit to Sarai as she should.

This is not a blanket command for people today to remain in dangerous or abusive situations. The Lord convicts and commands Hagar to return and submit to her mistress.

[28 : 35] At the same time, the Lord also comforts her. He comforts her with a promise. He says to her, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.

This sounds very similar to God's promise to Abraham that we read last chapter. Your descendants will be like the stars of the sky. Sounds very similar to that. And God continues to her. He says,

Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has listened to your affliction. Ishmael, the name Ishmael means God hears. That's the comfort to Hagar.

That God hears us. He listens to us. He will hear us. He hears your afflictions. He sees what you've been going through. He sees the mistreatment and he will look after you.

That's God's comfort to Hagar. Yet, it's not all sunshines and rainbows because the next verse says, verse 12, says that your son, he shall be a wild donkey of a man. It's probably not a good sign if you're called a donkey.

[29:36] But also, there's this promise of conflict that his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him. He shall be in conflict against all his kinsmen.

Despite Abram's and Sarai's sin, God redeemed the situation, blesses Ishmael with a multitude of descendants. But, there's still a consequence. Ishmael and his descendants will be marked with conflict.

And we see in Genesis, Ishmael later will have conflict with Isaac, the child of promise. Ishmaelites also will be the ones who buy Joseph from his brothers and bring him to slavery and to Egypt.

Sin can leave generational consequences. And so, the Lord redeemed the mess that Abram and Sarai caused by their efforts, but there are some consequences for their sin.

God both confronted and comforted Hagar with this. And this is how Hagar responds in verse 13.

She called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing, for she said, truly here I've seen him who looks after me.

[30:40] And this verse is significant because she's actually the only person in the Bible to give God a name, to give a name for God, to give God a new name.

But also know what Hagar says. She, God gave her this promise. But here, she doesn't mention anything about the promise. She doesn't mention anything about this multitude of offspring. She's actually more concerned about who God is than in what God promised her.

She has seen God. God saw her. God listened to her. She has seen the Lord and that's enough.

She was just a slave to Sarai, a tool that Sarai could use for her purposes.

She was disposable to Sarai. But God saw Hagar. God listened to Hagar and that was enough for her. Is that enough for us? To know that the Lord sees us in our waiting, in our problems.

He hears our afflictions. He is with us. Is that enough for us? And so Hagar obeys. She returns to Abram and notice this. The whole journey, this all thing started because Sarai had a plan.

[31:48] She wanted to do it herself, to take action, to fulfill God's promise, to have a child of her own. But verse 15 says, And Hagar bore Abram a son.

And Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. It's Abram's son whom Hagar bore.

There's no mention of Sarai. Ishmael, she wanted a son, but Ishmael isn't hers. At the end of it, he's Abram's son, Hagar's son. Her do-it-yourself plan just led to jealousy, division, and yes, in the middle, God redeemed it, gave his blessing.

But there's also conflict for countless generations. Sarai didn't get what she wanted. Her own attempts to strive, to stress, to strain, to obtain God's promise at the end amounted to nothing and just led to conflict down the line.

And the same is true for us. God doesn't need our striving to fulfill his promises. He doesn't need us to scheme for him to keep his word to us. And so this is a call for us to surrender our anxieties to God, to trust him, to trust his providence, to believe, have faith that following God never means missing out, that his way really is better than our own design.

[33:13] But that creates a tension for us. That if we aren't supposed to strive, then what's the balance between taking action, taking faithful action, and also waiting on God?

Because on the one hand, faith requires action. Abram had to pack his things up in Genesis chapter 12 when God told him to go leave his land, go to another land that God promised him.

And for us, we still have to study for exams. We still have to meet work deadlines. How can we tell that we're walking in faithful action or just trying to do it ourselves, scheme and do it ourselves?

Well, first, we know that whatever God calls us to do is going to align with what he's revealed in his word. His plan aligns with his word.

Abram taking another wife was acceptable in their culture, but is against God's revealed design for marriage. Obeying God requires action, but not by our own wisdom.

[34:12] We can test our plans against what's clear in God's word. And second, we can check our hearts. Are we acting out of faith in reliance of God or are we reacting in fear?

Abram and Sarai, they didn't act because they felt this peace and conviction that God's covenant would be fulfilled by taking Hagar as a second wife.

They did it because they were afraid. They were afraid that time was running out. They were anxious. They panicked and wanted to do something. And so for us, do our actions, they come from a place of anxiety and panic to try to force an outcome.

We need to land this job. I need to work as hard as I can to make this happen. Are we acting out of faith or in fear, in panic? And third, are we trying to do it ourselves or are we moving in reliance on God?

When we look at Genesis 16, do you know what we see? There's one thing that we see missing that I notice that's missing. That's prayer. Abram and Sarai, they never stop to ask God, is this what you want us to do?

[35:24] Is this how you will fulfill your covenant? Is taking Hagar your plan? And God, he names the child Ishmael, which means God hears.

God will hear. And that's the question for us. If God hears, then why don't we pray to him? If God hears, then what are they doing not praying to him?

Are we making our decisions in prayer in dependence on him or relying on ourselves? Psalm 127 says, unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor over it build it in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Are we acting with that faith or is our first instinct to do something or to pray knowing that if God is not with us, it will amount to nothing.

Abraham and Sarai, they tried to build the house themselves and the result is they labored in vain. They got Ishmael, a child born of the flesh, not of the promise. They tried to do it themselves and it didn't work.

[36:25] And if there's one thing we know, if there's one thing that we can't do for ourselves, it's earn our righteousness with God. There's one thing that we can't do is earn our way to God.

We can't earn our own salvation. What can a man give in exchange for his soul? Galatians 4 will later pick up on this. There is a child born of the flesh, born of human design, born by human striving and that's Ishmael, slaved, exhausted, cast out of the house.

On the other hand, there is another child, Isaac, that will later be born of the promise, born out of reliance on God's promise, out of faith. And that's the same for us, that when we strive, we take efforts to be a good person, to earn our way, earn our righteousness with God.

If what we're saying is, I'm trying my best, I can get to know you, God, I deserve eternity with you, God, because I was a good person, know that this will always amount to nothing when we try to do it ourselves.

Our only hope is that God made a covenant as we read last week with Abram, that he would take on the curse of our sin, that he would send an offspring who would crush the head of the snake, Jesus, who would accomplish everything he demands from us, if only we put our faith in him.

[37:48] That's what we learn here from Abram and Sarai's story. When we try to do it on our own, it'll make a mess. But God stepped down in Jesus, he sent his son to take on our mess, to die for our sins, rise from the dead so that we can have life, so that we don't have to do it ourselves because we can't.

And many of us are in a season of waiting right now, maybe waiting for a spouse, waiting for a child, waiting to progress in our careers, waiting for healing. And we have this assurance that God sees us, he hears our affliction.

And we know because we see what Jesus done on the cross. When he hung on the cross, that situation seemed desperate. It might have looked like at that time the promises of God would fail.

Jesus was dying, but in that hopeless moment when it seemed that God's plan amounted to nothing, that's when he was working. That's when Jesus took on the full penalty of our sins.

He did it so that all the promises of God find their yes in him. He did it so that we don't have to do it ourselves. And if we can trust him with our souls, with our salvation, why can't we also trust him with our schools, with our work, with our homes, when we're in the hospital, in our relationships, in our families?

[39 : 10] Can we not also trust him with those things? If we're getting tired of waiting, remember this. We don't have to do it ourselves. We can trust in Jesus.

He didn't take any shortcuts. He didn't take the easy way. In Gethsemane, he cried out, if there's any other way, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but yours be done. Can we do the same to surrender our striving and our scheming?

Surrender to him. Lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, looking to Jesus, and run with endurance the race that is set before us. Let's put our trust in him.

Let's pray. Let's pray. God, we thank you that you are someone we can put our faith in.

You are our firm foundation. You are the anchor for our soul. In Christ, all the promises of God find their yes and amen.

[40 : 15] we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. That what we mean for evil, you mean for good. That these light momentary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

They're not just happening, but are preparing for us glory. That we are co-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him. God, we hold to your promises.

We pray that you help us to hold to your promises. And we know that there is suffering now. There is waiting now. There's anxieties now.

But you are making all things new. Help us to trust you, to believe in you, to look to your coming. and you're worthy of our faith. Thank you, God. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.