

The Sequel

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Date: 09 August 2026

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[0:00] Thank you, Day. Thank you, Jojo. Yeah, we actually had Aaron share at the beginning of the summer about Young Life, and it was always nice for us just to circle back and say, hey, this is what they did in the summer of the camp.

And if you are interested, if you're like, okay, I think I can help in some way, then please do let us know. So we have the Friday evening, which is the gathering youth that happens on the 14th floor. But if you're like, okay, well, I can't do that. There's actually also Saturdays, the Chinese youth, which is the Explorer Fellowship.

They actually are in deep need of mentors as well. So if your Cantonese is actually stronger than your English, then now you have no excuse. And if you're like, oh, but on Sundays, I still prefer to be here. Well, ha, because we're moving the youth to Saturday.

So now that's also no excuse for you. So on a Saturday evening at 5 p.m. is when the Cantonese youth meet, and they also meet on the 14th floor as well. So plenty of opportunities. You don't just have to be young and cool like Jojo.

So you just have to love the Lord and have to love the next generation. That's it. You know, it's funny. As I was hearing about just youth camp, it reminded me that actually that's where Christina and I, we also grew up.

[1:09] I was around the same age as Ruben when I went to my first youth camp. And it's a blast. It's a blast. And actually, it's part of the growth of a Christian, you know, especially if you've grown up in a Christian household.

It's just instrumental in how it actually helps take you on this journey. It doesn't mean it doesn't mean that the journey is easy. It doesn't mean that it's just kind of this straight path from hating everything about God to eventually being in heaven and being like Christ.

It's rarely ever just like that, right? Those of us who, actually, who has been a Christian for the longest here? I wonder. I wonder who has been a Christian for the longest here.

Who's been a Christian here for 10 years or more? Put your hand up. 10 years. 15. Keep your hand up if you're 15 years. 20.

25. Oh, 30. Let's go, Rotho. It's over there. 35. 40.

[2:17] 45. Okay. 50. 55. I think it's close.

It's on one of these sides. Wait, how many years is it, Hank and Shirley? 1971. Woo!

1971. So I have this really cool story of Hank because I actually know one of his high school friends.

And actually, he went to this school in Hong Kong, which apparently isn't a very good school.

I think it's called DBS or something. Yeah, it's not a very good one. And his high school friend told me, actually, before he was a Christian, he would notice this group of, like, nerdy Christians go into the chapel at lunchtime to pray.

And he was like, that was a guy called Henry Zhang, which is now who we know as Hank. And I was like, wow. Hank, you've been on just this journey of faith for so, so many years. What's the most challenging part about staying in the faith?

[3:26] What would you say? Sorry, I'm putting you on the spot. I know you don't like speaking usually, but... When we're so different from the rest of the world. Man, that's the biggest one, right?

When we're so different from... The temptation to fit in. The temptation to fit in and go, well, if everyone else is doing that, then maybe I should do that too.

Because I don't want to be isolated. I don't want to... I'm fearful, is what you're saying. I've been reading a book recently called The Hour and Forming. And it was trying to kind of really dive into how we approach the faith.

And so often they say that we think spiritual formation is this linear line. Okay, who's a type A personality? Just put your hand up. I'm not asking for the other one because you won't put your hand up. Who's a type A?

Come on, just loud and proud. Just put it up and say, yeah, I am a type A. Okay? If you're a type A, right? If you're a type A personality, you're kind of... I love it. Just the wife just shoving her husband's hand up. You are type A.

[4:24] Confess. When you're a type A personality, or actually when you're just so used to a society like Hong Kong and how it works, you're just expecting that the moment you accept Christ is you're just going up.

You're just making this journey from A to Z and you're getting better and better and better. You're getting stronger and stronger and stronger as a Christian. You're looking more and more like Christ. And who's ever felt that anxiety, that low-grade hum anxiety where you're like, I'm just not where I should be.

You start from A. You're hoping you end Z, but you get stuck at D or E. And you're like, I'm still here again. I'm still struggling with that same stuff.

And then you get angry. You get annoyed. Like, why am I still here? I shouldn't be dealing with this problem anymore. Why am I still dealing with the same thing that I dealt with as a teenager?

Because we've brought into this idea that spiritual formation is just like this, when actually it's not. If anything, it's more like this. It's more like cycles and seasons. When you understand that, you start getting less anxious about how you're progressing.

[5:34] And you kind of just accept it. You know, and the book carries on and says, the reason why we get so anxious is because we think life is this. And then we get frustrated when it's not. When actually, since the beginning of time, humans have known that seasons dictate everything.

Winter. Spring. Summer. Autumn. Day. Night. Life. Death. It's only when we started to industrialize society and we came up with electricity and we realized we can actually dictate when it's night. We can actually create light ourselves. Suddenly we lose that sense of rhythm, that sense of season. And then we wonder why we're so anxious. When actually built into the way we were is this idea that growth is seasonal.

Growth is life and death, life and death. The farmers would understand this. Those in agriculture would understand this. Those in the city really struggle. And when we really struggle, we are so annoyed and frustrated.

And that low-grade harm is where we have. And actually, it's on that. We're going to continue our story into the book of Genesis where we're going to talk about one of the most important people in the history of mankind, Abraham himself, the father of the faith.

[6:51] And it's really interesting. You see him living in seasons. You see him living in cycles. You see him oscillating between faith and fear.

And it's really annoying when you read it because you're like, you are such an idiot. And yet we go, oh, actually, that's actually us. And I actually forgot to ask someone to read.

So, J1, you're the closest. So, you are up. Can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord as we read Genesis chapter 20? There's a lot of cities names here. That's why I was like, I'm not doing it either.

All right. This is the word of the Lord. From there, Abraham journeyed towards the territory of the Negev and lived between Kaddish and Shur. And he sojourned in Gerar.

And Abraham said of Sarah, his wife, she is my sister. And Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken.

[7:49] For she is a man's wife. Now, Abimelech had not approached her. So, he said, Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, she is my sister? And she herself said, he is my brother.

In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands, I have done this. Then God said to him in the dream, yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart. And it was I who kept you from sinning against me.

Therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.

So, Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, what have you done to us?

And how have I sinned against you that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said to Abraham, what did you see that you did this thing?

[8:51] Abraham said, I did it because I thought, there is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, though not the daughter of my mother.

And she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, this is the kindness you must do to me. At every place to which we come, say of me, he is my brother.

Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen and male servants and female servants and gave them to Abraham and returned Sarah, his wife, to him. And Abimelech said, behold, my land is before you. Dwell where it pleases you.

To Sarah, he said, behold, I have given you your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you and before everyone you are vindicated. Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.

For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you so much, Jay. Please take a seat. So isn't it interesting that actually Abraham, the father of the faith, well, actually you're reading this and you're like, wait, hold on a second.

[10:00] I think I've read this story before. And I'll tell you, actually you have. It's a similar one. It's in Genesis 12. He does the same thing. He goes into a foreign land, and then he's afraid of his life because the culture there is if the foreign kings saw someone they wanted to take, a woman they wanted to take, they would take that woman, and then they would actually kill the husband.

And so for the second time, he does this. And it reminds me that just our lives, our Christian journey is this one of oscillating between faith and fear. This is Abraham, the father of the faith.

So if you are young here and you've gone to camps and you're starting to grow, I'd like to encourage you. Well, actually, I'd like to warn you first that it's actually not going to be easy from here. In fact, often it gets harder and harder.

And when you have that inevitable down cycle, don't get annoyed. Don't get frustrated. Don't get worried. Life is seasons. Spiritual formation is seasons.

It's cycles. It's growth. Because you see Abraham doing the exact same thing that he did only eight chapters ago. And it's really interesting. I was talking to a good friend, a dear, dear friend of mine who actually was saying, it's so annoying that I'm still struggling with the same thing.

[11:07] And actually, it happens every time I make a big step towards God. Every time I serve, just that little bit more. Every time I speak. Every time I preach. Every time. And then the inevitable fall comes immediately after.

That week. Who's experienced that before? When you serve and you take that leap of faith and go out and serve at Young Life Camp or do whatever it is. And then the next week, things come crashing down. Right? Adults are nodding because you're like, yep, that's just life.

And then it made me think, you know what? Abraham was the same thing. Genesis chapter 12. God says, go. Go to the new land. What happens straight after that? He falls and he lies. And then he has the promises in Genesis chapter, well, from 14 onwards.

So chapter 15, God comes back and says, hey, remember, I promised you something. What happens in 16? He lies. He hears from God and the very next chapter he lies and he goes to Hagar. And then chapter 17 and 18, you just see Abraham is just going through this cycle. And you read chapter 20 and you're like, wow, we still have not learned. We still have not decided to choose faith.

[12:12] Over fear. It is so hard. It's just what Hank just said. That temptation to fit in, that temptation to survive is one that's dictated from us going, actually, I'm going to live out of fear here and not out of faith.

And you see this happening in Abraham's life. Just a side note here. Chapter 20 from verse 1. From there, Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur

and he sojourned in Jerob. For me, I'm just like, this has been my story.

I had, again, another dear friend this week who said, Christina and I, our lives reminded them of Abraham and Sarah. And I was like, Abraham's a bit of a douche. And I'm like, yes, because I am too.

And Abraham, even though he was promised so much, spends most of his life living in tents, sojourning. And that just hit me deeply. I'm just like, wow, this might just be it.

We just might be going from place to place, never feeling truly at home. And that's actually what we're supposed to do. In Hebrews 13, when it says, actually, we're living for this eternal city.

[13:15] I'm just like, wow, Abraham is doing just that. And so verse 2. And Abraham said of Sarah, his wife, she is my sister. So again, he does the same thing. It's interesting, though. He's not telling a complete lie.

He's telling a half-truth. Because actually, she was his half-sister. How many of us have told half-truths to try and get out of problems? People are like, look, I'm not telling a lie.

It is kind of true. I also just need to tell you what you need to hear so that you won't kill me. How many of us have done that at work? How many of us have done that at school? I, again, was convicted of that.

I was like, wow, sometimes I just shy away from those honest, clear truths. We call them white lies. And yet Abraham here falls into that same cycle, the father of the faith.

So what is the response to all of this? And how does it all play out? And as we look at this story, I want to kind of debunk some myths that we have about the Christian faith. But actually, I realized that I had growing up as well.

[14:12] And the first thing is what I just said. Spiritual formation is not linear. It just keeps going in cycles. And we have to embrace that. We have to lean into that. The author, Cindy Lee, talks about it and says that actually God is not really in a hurry to complete the project that is us.

He said he will bring it to completion, Philippians 1, but actually it's a slow one. It's a seasonal one. He's not in a rush. The whole point of life here and the challenges is to form us.

The word that we're talking about is what? The journey of being, say it Kelly, say it loud.

Sanctification. Sanctification. Who thought of that word this week?

Who kind of just in their everyday life is like, you know what? Sanctification is my thing. I'm all about sanctification. Life sucks, but I know that God's put me in this place because he's trying to sanctify me.

What does that word actually mean? That word actually simply means he's trying to mold us to be like Christ. The moment we accept Jesus, we are now justified. That means we are ready to enter into God's presence.

[15:21] But on the whole, there's this life journey that happens, which is sanctification, where actually he's molding us. And he's using life and he's using suffering and he's using resistance to do it. This is exactly, and I've said many times before, this is exactly like going to the gym.

And I've told you and I've confessed to all of you that this year I feel that God's been convicting me that I also need to, Ethan's just smiling, he's like, that I should be going to the gym. And God felt so, so strongly about this that he put a brand new gym just downstairs from our church in Far East Finance Center.

And it's beautiful. 24-7 is beautiful. It's a basketball hoop, by the way, ballers. And as I was down there, as I was down there, Jojo, I was there, just to take a look around, just to see what's up.

I realized we're in a basement. I was like, there's no light here. These conditions are not great. And it just made me think that's what time on this planet is. We're in a basement.

We've got gym machines around everywhere. We're working on resistance. We're undergoing the process of sanctification to prepare ourselves for an eternity with Christ. But this isn't the end. The basement is not the end. The basement is simply the place that we're getting prepared to head into eternity.

[16:32] And so that's what God is doing here. And so our job is to lean into that and also to live with conviction, to not live with hard truths. Sometimes we live with hard truths. Sometimes you tell white lies in your workplace or in your family homes or with your friends.

Why? Because John Stott says this. We tell half truths when we want the benefits of honesty while keeping the safety of deceit. Ouch. We tell half truths because we want the benefits of honesty while keeping the safety of deceit.

But God is never honored by our calculated compromises. We have to make a decision to not be compromised. We have to make a decision to choose faith over fear. And it's not just today. And it's not even just next week. It's every single day. Our journey is that. I've been reading the Bible this week with Lobo. And he introduced me to a corporate term.

Well, I think it's a corporate term. Well, maybe I'm just too ignorant. He said, actually, we've been reading through the book of James. And it's like, oh, the improvement loop is what you talked about. That actually life is just an improvement loop.

[17:32] It's just us counting trials of all kinds as joy. Because why? God's using them to help improve us, to help grow us, to help improve us, to sanctify us, is what he's saying here.

And so it's really interesting. So he does the same thing. But Abimelech, the king, this is very similar to the story in chapter 12, but it's different as well. And it says, and Abimelech, king of Jeroz, sent and took Sarah, takes her into a harem.

Again, Abraham, the same guy who sent his wife to be in the harem of another king, does it again for the second time. Wives can look at their husbands and go, if you ever did that to me, it'll be over. And yet he does it again. But the same thing again. This foreign king who doesn't know God at all has a dream and God speaks to him. And imagine you don't know God at all and then you have a dream. And this is what the dream says, verse 3.

Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife. Imagine waking up to that dream. So the king's like, what? I didn't realize this.

[18:33] I'm just following my customs. I've seen someone that I like. Now, yes, she did come with a whole crew, but that's only her brother. So I'm taking her because I like her. Interestingly, he replies.

Now, Abimelech had not approached her, which meant that he actually hadn't been close with her just yet. And so he replies to God, Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, she is my sister?

And she herself said, he is my brother. In the integrity of my heart, the innocence of my hands, I have done this. Isn't that interesting? In case you are prone to religious elitism, where you think God only speaks to you because you're a Christian, I want to assure you that's not the case here.

God can speak to anyone he pleases to. He speaks to the outsiders. He speaks to those inside. Why? Because to him, everyone, everyone belongs to his family. So you have to see it from that. You look at some people, you go, I judge the way you live. You will never hear from God as well because you have turned. No, no, no. God's grace covers all of us. It's called common grace. And so what he has here is he hears from God.

[19:36] And then what we see here is that we as Christians, we as those who follow God, we have to have a sense of humility that we don't look down on other people and say, well, they're not living the right way. God has the ability to reach and speak to anyone he wants to.

And so he speaks to him and he says, hey, you need to give her back. Ironically, this foreign king, this pagan king says, look, I have done nothing wrong.

And then God says something really interesting, which is this, verse six. Then God said to him in the dream, yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart. And it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her.

Now then return the man's wife. Common grace. So actually God is sovereign. He is in control. There is evil that he allows. But there's also moments where he decides, OK, this is not going to be part of the plan.

I'm going to protect Abimelech from committing this grievous crime. I'm going to protect him. And he doesn't even know it. How many of us have lived a life before Christ where actually God has protected us from things that we didn't even know?

[20:39] They're like, oh, I'm so glad that didn't work out. And you see, and that's when we weren't even trusting in him. And yet we get a glimpse here of God's heart again. He's not here just to condemn people.

He's not here to send judgment. But he's also here to love. He's also here to show mercy. He's also here to show grace. And then it gets really ironic.

Verse seven. And now then return the man's wife for he is a prophet. Did you know that this is the first time the Bible mentions the word prophet? Okay. Imagine with me again.

God's talking to this pagan king and he's saying, you're a dead man because you've done something that you're not supposed to do. And then the king says, wait, wait, wait. I didn't know about this. I'm innocent. And then God says, I know you are. I'm actually trying to protect you. Just give him back to the man who lied to you. Give her back to the man who lied to you because he is a prophet. A prophet caught in compromise. Isn't that interesting?

[21 : 37] This should actually burst the bubble for us as to how we approach people in leadership, people who are deemed as pastors and Christian leaders and all these things.

You see here the very first mention of the word prophet. It's almost just comical. That, hey, I know he lied to you, but go and talk to him and he'll pray for you.

He's a prophet. Just let that sink in for a second. Let that confront your perceptions of what pastors and prophets should be like. You think, oh, they should be these perfect people.

From the very beginning, it was never about the pastor or the prophet. From the very beginning, it was about them doing whatever it is that God called them to do.

What does a prophet even mean? The prophet just simply means they are a mouthpiece of God's heart. They're not the authority, necessarily. This first prophet was compromised in telling half-truths.

[22 : 43] It makes me think who I am as a leader. It makes me think what I should be like. What about you as leaders of your households, as leaders of your workplaces, as leaders of your small groups and your friendship circles?

Do you recognize who you are? Is there compromise in your life? God knows and God sees and he remains in control.

It's ironic because he was supposed to bring blessing to the nations. And yet, because of this lie, because of him tricking this pagan king, he now brings a curse on this nation. What is the curse?

This is even more interesting. The curse is because Sarah was part of the king's harem, all the women of their people could not get pregnant. The wounds were closed because of this.

He was supposed to bring blessing and yet he brings curse. And it tells me something else about sin, which is it never just affects you. Whatever compromise you're in, whatever slippery slope that you're on and you've kind of let yourself believe that, hey, it's just me, it's never just you.

[23 : 47] What you're doing never just affects you. Last week I described sin as disrupting social harmony. All our actions have consequences. We are forgiven, we are freed because Christ paid the price.

But there are still consequences to our actions. And you see here, Abraham, this prophet caught in compromise actually brings a curse onto this people instead of a blessing.

It tells me something about leaders as well, that God doesn't choose perfect people to use because there are none. He uses broken people, he uses imperfect people to carry out his perfect plan.

That's you and I.

This should be sobering for us as we're looking at this because we're like, wow, Abraham, the father of the faith, oscillating between faith and fear, going up and down. Every time he has a high, he drops back down to a low.

Now he's lying and now the other king who doesn't even know God finds out that he's lying, but yet he's still a prophet. All of this just feels comical. And that is actually how we're supposed to even approach this holy God.

[24 : 45] We have no business being here. So in some sense, the testimony there is like, I can't even be a Christian. I'm not worthy. It's actually not too far off from the biblical truth, which is what Peter does whenever he meets Jesus.

He's like, depart from me. I'm a sinner. Get away from me. I am not worthy to even be close to you, God. So half of it is right, but then the second half is actually we can now come and approach Christ.

Why? Because he came to us. It is ridiculous. If you're sat here going, hey, I'm actually a good Christian. I've earned the right to be here. Then you are wrong. What we're supposed to feel is, man, I have no business being here.

How amazing is this grace? Despite everything that I've done, yet Christ would still love me and Christ would still die for me. That's the approach that we should have. So spiritual formation is not linear.

We are no better. God speaks to anyone he wants to. And leaders are not perfect because leaders often, often operate out of a place of fear. One of my favorite devotionals is called My Upmost for His Highest.

[25 : 47] And the writer Oswald Chambers says, it talks about this idea of fear. That actually when we fear God, we won't fear anything else. But if we don't fear God, we will fear everything else. Goes back to Hank's point.

Right? Actually, we have this desire to want to fit in. We have desire to be tempted to basically do what everyone else does. Why? Because we have a fear of being isolated. We have a fear of disapproval. What we're actually saying is that we're actually not afraid of God.

It's really ironic because if you fast forward a little bit, Abimelech wakes up from the dream and goes, what the heck? And then goes and finds Abraham and says, what have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you that you have brought on me in my kingdom a great sin?

You have done to me things that ought not to be done. Isn't it interesting that a non-Christian, a pagan king actually knows what is right and what is wrong more than Abraham himself? He says, what have you done?

No one does this to people. And then Abimelech said to Abraham, what did you see that you did this thing? Abraham said, I did it because I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place and they will kill me because of my wife.

[26 : 47] What an ironic statement. He looked and said, I looked at you guys and judged you guys and thought, you know what? I can't trust my life with you guys. And actually, you don't have any fear of God. When in reality, the truth is he didn't trust God.

He didn't fear God. That fear of God, that healthy fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It's actually knowing how to live. What about your life? When we are caught in those moments where we are tempted to compromise, where we are tempted to tell half-truths, where's that coming from? And it doesn't matter whether you've been a Christian for two days or whether you've been a Christian for 51 years. Every day is that same decision. Am I going to choose faith over fear? Am I going to choose my faith in God, knowing that this is the thing to do?

This is what I'm going to do because of my trust in God. Some of you have decisions to make right now about your career, about your relationships, about your family, about your conduct, whatever it is. Some of you have those decisions that you're wondering right now.

The question I have for you is simple. Your decision, is it going to be based on faith or is it going to be based on fear? Faith or fear? We do oscillate. We keep going.

[27 : 56] But that's part of the journey. The goal is, as we live in this cycle, this seasonal cycle, this cycle starts to trend upwards. Or our capacity for God starts to grow bigger.

Our ability to choose faith over fear gets stronger and stronger. And then, what happens after this? So he says, There is no fear of God at all in this place. Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, though not the daughter of my mother.

Then she became my wife. So he's like, look, I know I did lie, but I kind of told the truth. It's like, calm down, chill out, even though now your whole nation is about to die. And when God calls me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, this is the kindness you must do.

And every place to which you may come, say of me, he is my brother. I just want to stop there for a second. Because only a few chapters ago, God shows up to the tent of strangers and says, this time next year, I'm coming back and you're going to have a son.

So he has that promise. He has that reminder. And then he falls again straight away. Can you see the pattern that he's living? And can you see our own patterns of living? So in one year's time, he's going to have a baby.

[28 : 58] And yet, when he gets there, he still operates out of fear. He still can't do it. And so he says, because at this point, she's not pregnant yet. But it's getting close.

Because remember, if the stranger said, the angel said, it's going to be one year. So that's one calendar year. The baby should be nine to ten months. So this is probably just one or two months after that encounter in the tent.

So she's not pregnant yet. And they're traveling. And he's still operating from a place of fear and not faith. And ironically, verse 14, then Abimelech took sheep and oxen and male servants and female servants and gave them to Abraham and returned Sarah and his wife to them.

And Abimelech said, behold, my land is before you. Dwell wherever it pleases you. I just think this story gets more and more strange as we go. He's done something wrong. Have we all agreed with that? Just nod with me. If you're like, okay, this is not a great move, Abraham.

Like, now what you've done is now for everyone to see for the rest of history. This is not a cool move. And then something happens again. He tells a lie. He tells a lie. Puts a whole nation in danger.

[30:01] And then God says to the king, go to this prophet and he will pray for you and he will heal. So he still has a role to play. And God turns it around from a curse into a blessing.

And this king, actually, even though he was the innocent party in all of this, still gives Abraham a lot of stuff.

He says, look, now you're here. Look around. Where do you want to live? You go and live there.

Okay. You want to live in Repulse Bay? You go and live in Repulse Bay. Just go there. Go hang out there. It's beautiful. The view is great. You go and live there.

Choose wherever you want to live. Okay. You want to go to Stanley? Okay. You go to Stanley instead. Move over there. Take all your whole party. Go over there. This doesn't make sense, right? And this challenges something else that I think a lot of us have when it comes to the Christian faith, which is this.

When I do something bad, God will punish me. How many of you have that? How many of you are having a tough time or something bad is happening to you and you're like, oh, maybe it's because I'm not close to God.

[30:59] Maybe it's because I've stopped reading the Bible. Maybe it's because I've stopped praying. And I'm going to be here to challenge you and say that is a wrong perception of who God is.

If he really did judge us by our actions and by our merits, we would all be screwed. I tell you that now. That is not how he works. The irony here, and I hope you see this, is even though he keeps making these mistakes, somehow he still keeps getting blessed.

Is this an excuse to then say, well, maybe I should just keep doing wrong because God's going to keep blessing me? That is not the point of this sermon either. But the point of this sermon is to tell you, what perception of God do you have that is actually wrong?

The parable of the tenants, where that person who wastes his tenant because he buries it. And then what does he say? He says, oh, I thought you were a harsh man.

I think a lot of us have this perception that we only get good things when we do good. That when we lie, we'll get punished. But I don't think that's how God works.

[32:03] For the second time, he lies and makes a mistake, yet God still pours out blessing onto Abraham through a pagan foreign king. God still blesses.

I don't know how that should challenge the way you think, but somehow what we see here is he is a God of justice, but he is also a God of love. So what's this really story about?

It's not really about Abraham. The person who, in Hebrews 11, in the Hall of Fame, has the most written about him. Yet he is just constantly trapped in this cycle of faith and fear.

The story isn't here to tell us about Abraham. The story is here to tell us about God. That despite our fickleness, despite us constantly going in these cycles, God remains sovereign.

God remains in control. God remains loving, and he keeps blessing regardless. I don't know where you are in your cycle.

[33:16] If I'm correct, and if my pastoral senses are right, and through the conversations I've had with you, I think most of us feel as though we're probably trending downwards, or we're just stuck in this stale place. And I'm here to say, well, actually, that's a great place to be, because that's exactly the place Abraham was when God kept using him.

Just lean in to that cycle. Lean in for the ride. And each day, just decide in your heart, in your mind, to choose faith over fear. Every time you're confronted with an opportunity, should I tell a half-truth or should I not tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

When someone asks you, what did you do on the weekend? Tell them that I went to church and I worshiped God, and then I spent time with my brothers and sisters. Let us commit to being the faithful people that God calls us to be, not because we are faithful, but because he is faithful.

Because irregardless of our actions, irregardless of our fickleness, God seems to keep being here for us. Because why was God so concerned about protecting Sarah this time?

That he would show up in a dream of a pagan king and said, you're a dead man. Or if you carry on this road, it's going to lead to death. Why? Because he knew that within a few months, in the womb of Sarah, there would come a boy.

[34 : 40] And this boy would start this line. This boy is Isaac, and he would start this line and will continue to go down. It was imperative, it was essential for the salvation of mankind that God protected this.

Because if he didn't protect Sarah from King Abimelech, we would have thought, wait, is that son Abraham's or is that son Abimelech's? It was imperative for the survival of humans that Isaac would be born of Abraham.

And the line will keep going down and down and down, eventually to the boy who brings blessing onto mankind. And of course, you all know by now, that boy is Jesus.

That boy who ends up growing in stature and wisdom, ends up standing in front of government officials who challenge him and say, are you really the son of God? Saying, tell me your true identity.

And he didn't operate in half-truths. Actually, all he needed to say at that moment was, well, am I the son of God? Well, it depends who you ask, and theologically, if you look at the Greek and you look at the Hebrew, or like, I'm kind of son of man and son of God, and I'm son of David.

[35 : 51] Like, it could be anything. Like, what do you think? Like, well, how's it going to get me out of prison? How's it going to get me away from the cross? No, he stood there, and he said to Pilate, yes, it is as you say. He owned up to his identity.

He owned up to the truth, knowing that this would cost him his life. When the father of the faith, all the way back to Abraham, hid behind a half-truth to preserve his own life, to the point where he would give up his own wife, now we have Jesus standing there going, yes, I am who I say I am, and I am here to give up myself for the sake of mankind.

I am here to pay for the ransom of all. That is Jesus. If you're wondering, what's the secret to choosing faith over fear?

Look to Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 1.20, it says, all of God's promises are yes and amen. If you're wondering, is God really going to look after me?

Is he really going to provide for me? Is he really going to care for my children? Is he going to bring my children back to him? Is he going to give me the right job? Am I going to have enough food to eat next year? All of these questions, God says, all of these promises are yes and amen.

[36 : 56] Why? Because of Jesus. All these promises are yes and amen because of Christ Jesus. And how would he who gave his only son not graciously give us all the things that we need?

And we will not be separated from the love of Christ ever again. If you are worried, if you are tempted to choose fear over faith in your seasonal growth as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, then I encourage you to look to Christ and say, you know what?

I'm going to choose faith today because I'm looking at Jesus and God will not let me down. I think that's how we hold on. That's how we hold on.

Roller coasters. They are up and down. Life, the Christian journey is a roller coaster. But guess what that seatbelt is there for? Guess what that bar when you raise down is for? That's the thing that's going to hold you even when you start going upside down.

That bar is Jesus himself. You hold on to that bar and you say, God's promises to me are yes and amen because of Christ Jesus. So I will go up and down, but I'm going to hold on to this bar. The flood will come, but I'm going to get into the ark because that's the only place that is safe.

[38 : 03] Can we, as a spiritual family, be committed to going on this journey, this roller coaster, this oscillating, this seasonal growth, but choose faith over fear? I'm going to invite Kelly to start preparing us, but I want to just leave a quick few action points for you today.

What does this look like for you? As I invite you to think about your seasonal growth, where are you? I mean, I don't know. Are you in spring where things are really on the up and growing? Are you in summer where it's just, well, are you in summer in a place where it's not kind of suffocating with humidity, that it's just a nice soft breeze and you're just living life and you're just like Olaf dancing in the summer fields?

Or are you in autumn where you're like, look, I just had a really good season, but things feel like they're kind of like slowing down a little bit. The leaves are kind of turning color.

Or are you just in deep, dark winter and it's just cold? I'll say to you, whatever season that you are in, God is there. Don't be ashamed of it.

The enemy uses shame as his number one weapon. It is his special power because he's making you believe that you're the only one in winter. Just lean into it and get, okay, I'm in winter right now, but God is with me.

[39:24] And I'm going to trend back up again. The seasons keep coming. And actually, there's beauty in every season. That's why I would never live in Singapore.

Let us embrace the seasons where we can put on down jackets. Let us embrace the seasons where things start to grow.

Let us embrace the seasons where things start to die. Knowing that God is faithful through it all. Is your fear a fear of worth?

Are you working to prove yourself? Then look to the cross. The work is already done. Can you imagine if we could only get to heaven because of how we behave and what grade we get in life? Then we wouldn't need the cross.

Jesus wouldn't have to die. But because of the cross, you now know that you are of infinite worth. So you don't have to choose the fear of worth anymore because you can choose that I truly believe that I am worth it.

[40:27] Is your fear a fear of identity? Maybe like Abraham, you're like, look, I actually don't even know who I am. So many of us go through that. Am I Western or am I Eastern? I don't know. Every dinner time I'm trying to choose between the two.

But what if I told you you were a child of God? With a loving father just there waiting to embrace you.

Regardless of what season, regardless of whatever cuisine you want to eat. Who are you? You are you. His beloved. Choose faith in that.

Do you have a fear of failure? How do you know you have a fear of failure? It's because you're trying to control everything. Every little decision that your children makes. Every little thing that you do in your career.

You're trying to control everything. Why? Because you're terrified of failure. Choose faith. Choose faith. Because the Lord said it is finished.

[41:28] Choose faith because he says that unless I build it, you build it in vain anyway. Or is it the fear of the future? You just don't know what will happen.

You don't know what will happen to your loved one. You don't know what will happen to your parents. You don't know what will happen to your kids. You don't know what will happen to you. You're acting as though you know just because you're worried about it, that you will be able to control it. Isn't that what Jesus says in Matthew 6?

It's like, what are you worried about? This week was my niece Lily's birthday. She has no care or fear in the world.

She's just currently being suffocated by her dad with the baby carrier. Zero worries about whether there will be food.

Zero worries. They named her Lily and it reminds you of the lilies of the field that God clothes. If you have a fear of the future, then I offer to you a cheesy fridge magnet quote.

[42:29] If you do not know what your future holds, it's okay because you know who holds your future. So choose faith. Choose faith over fear.

And I guarantee you, you will still oscillate. You will still go up and down. I am so sorry. Well, we're currently in the basement of a gym.

And this is what it is. But we're being sanctified. We're being molded. And he will bring to completion what he started. His promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

He is sovereign. He is here. He is good. He loves us. Let us worship with that. Father, we thank you. We declare your goodness. We declare your sovereignty.

You are the king of every season. So whether we're grieving or we're fearful. We are fearful. And to be honest, we are all fearful.

[43:30] Help us choose faith today. Help us put one step in front of the other today. Help us choose you today. Help us look to you today. Help us learn from Lily today.

Help us learn from Lily today. That we are deeply loved. by our father who just desires to hold us. And wrap his loving arms around us.

Propping up our necks as we rest. Jesus, today we choose you. Thank you.