

God Renews His Promise

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God's covenant promises are based on His faithfulness, not ours.

MAIN PASSAGES: Genesis 25:21-26,29-34; 26:1-6

Did you know that the invention of Post-it® Notes was completely unexpected, a discovery on the journey for a different solution? We have all experienced times when things have not gone as we might have expected, whether for better or worse. The question for us as followers of Christ is how do we make sense of those times? What do we do when God seems to throw us a curveball?



When has something not gone as you have expected? How did that impact your relationship with God?

Group Time

Point 1: God's promises are kept in unusual ways (Gen. 25:21-26).

²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The LORD was receptive to his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²² But the children inside her struggled with each other, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ And the LORD said to her:

Two nations are in your womb; two peoples will come from you and be separated.

One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.

²⁴ When her time came to give birth, there were indeed twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first one came out red-looking, covered with hair like a fur coat, and they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out grasping Esau's heel with his hand. So he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

In His grace and faithfulness, the Lord heard Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah conceived. But Rebekah's long-desired pregnancy, which surely caused great joy, thankfulness, and celebration, took an unexpected turn. The twins growing inside of her began to struggle, causing her to seek the Lord. Once again, God heard and responded. And in yet another unexpected turn in this story, God told Rebekah that her firstborn son would serve the younger.



What truths about God can help us live with endurance in the midst of unexpected adversity and unusual circumstances?



Voices from Church History

"Beloved, how blessed and marvelous are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in boldness, faith in confidence, self-control in holiness; and all these things fall within our understanding. What things are being prepared for those who endure? The Creator and Father of the ages, the All-holy himself, knows their greatness and beauty. Let us then strive to be among those who endure so that we may share in the promised gifts."¹

—Clement of Rome (c. 30-100)


Point 2: God's promises are given to unworthy people (Gen. 25:29-34).

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field exhausted. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, because I’m exhausted.” That is why he was also named Edom. ³¹ Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.” ³² “Look,” said Esau, “I’m about to die, so what good is a birthright to me?” ³³ Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to Jacob and sold his birthright to him. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave bread and lentil stew to Esau; he ate, drank, got up, and went away. So Esau despised his birthright.

Esau	Jacob
_____, Older Brother	Second Son, _____
Great Hunter, Outdoorsman	Quiet Man, Preferred Home
Favored by _____	Favored by _____
_____, Unspiritual	_____, Deceptive
_____	_____

Esau was not worthy of the promises of God, but neither was Jacob. The elder son of Isaac had no regard for spiritual things; the younger son used manipulation to wrestle the birthright, and later the blessing, from his brother. Yet God still worked through this family to bring about the promises He had made to Abraham.

We too are unworthy to be recipients of God’s love, grace, and mercy. We too are unworthy to be used by God as a light in the midst of sin’s darkness. We fail to value spiritual blessings; we give ourselves over to chasing after fleshly things in sinful ways; and we operate from a worldly mind-set rather than a spiritual one. Yet the Scriptures tell us that God can still work His redemption in and through unworthy people like us.

 How should the faithful, ongoing work of God even through unworthy sinners challenge our fears and excuses against obeying God in faith?

Point 3: God's promises are based on His unchanging faithfulness (Gen. 26:1-6).

¹ There was another famine in the land in addition to the one that had occurred in Abraham's time. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, at Gerar. ² The LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land that I tell you about; ³ stay in this land as an alien, and I will be with you and bless you. For I will give all these lands to you and your offspring, and I will confirm the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, ⁵ because Abraham listened to me and kept my mandate, my commands, my statutes, and my instructions." ⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar.

God was committed to His promises, but how could He be? Abraham and Isaac failed to obey God completely and their faith in God wavered at times. We only question because we focus on the wrong person. Our gaze should not rest on Abraham or Isaac and their flaws but should be fixed on God, who swore an oath to Abraham. This God is full of truth, goodness, kindness, and faithfulness, and He is unchanging.

God Is Unchanging: God's unchanging nature is good news for Christians, for it guarantees that God does not change His mind or go back on His _____. Christians can find _____ and _____ in knowing that the God who brought them out of darkness will carry them through into eternity.



Why do you think it is important that God's own faithfulness, and not ours, secures His promises and grace?

Though Abraham was an unworthy sinner, he did believe God's promises, so he listened and obeyed. The unchanging, faithful God used Abraham, and now He extends that same grace to us. God does not save us or use us for His redemptive purposes because we are worthy but because Jesus Christ is. God promised Abraham and Isaac to bless the world through their offspring—it was Jesus who died on the cross to take away the sin of the world. And now those who have Abraham's faith, who trust in Jesus, obey God's commands and joyfully spread the gospel around the world.



How should we respond to the truths that we are unworthy sinners, God is faithful to His promises, and Christ died for our sins?

My Mission

Because we are imperfect and unworthy people whom God uses to accomplish His purposes, we boldly share and show the love of Christ with all others, inviting them into God's kingdom through Jesus.

- **As an unworthy sinner, how will you honor the covenant-keeping God who sent His Son to die for our sins?**
- **What are some steps we can take to help one another confess sin and fight against it?**
- **Where and with whom will you share about God's faithfulness, graciousness, and love in Christ?**

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Genesis 25:19-26

What we do instinctively in times of adversity—in the midst of life’s trials and struggles—can be quite revealing. Do we wring our hands in despair? Do we make a plan and a task list to deal with the situation we are facing? Or do we turn to God?

As we read this passage describing Isaac and Rebekah’s inability to have children, we are reminded of Abraham and Sarah’s shared struggle with infertility (see Gen. 15:1-6; 16:1-16; 18:9-15). It was no accident that the first two married couples through whom God was forming His great nation faced this same challenge—God was making it abundantly clear that His people would be raised up by His hand alone.

It is helpful to consider the different responses of these couples as they faced their infertility. Both Abraham and Sarah tried to take matters into their own hands and solve their “problem,” resulting in great disaster. Later, Sarah seemed to resign herself to her barrenness and laughed at the news she would have a son. Even so, God was faithful to His promise and provided Isaac.

However, when Isaac faced the same trial, he did not follow in his parents’ footsteps. Perhaps he had heard from them the story of his birth time and time again, with its joys and their flaws.

So instead of despairing or taking matters into his own hands, he turned to God and interceded for his wife. This act of love for Rebekah and trust in God provides an example of what our instinct in times of adversity should be.



Voices from Church History

“When God gives a promise, he always tries our faith. Just as the roots of trees take firmer hold when they are contending with the wind; so faith takes firmer hold when it struggles with adverse appearances.”²

—Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)



What is your instinctive response to adversity? What can you do to be more apt to turn to God in these times?

Day 2: Read Genesis 25:27-34

As we read the narratives in the Bible, we might be prone to read over verses like Genesis 25:27-28 too quickly. Verses like these seem to add a little color to the account but not much substance. However, we need to remember that all of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), even genealogies!

These verses serve two important purposes. First, they act as a hinge between the brief birth narrative of Jacob and Esau and what follows. The Lord had told Rebekah that her twins would be pitted against each other, and she felt the truth of that as they grappled in the womb. Second, these verses reveal favoritism that would fuel conflict in their family. In two brief sentences, we are reminded that this was a broken family. Yet despite their brokenness, God used them, just as He uses broken people like us today.



How has God used your brokenness for His glory in the past? How might He use the brokenness you are experiencing today?

Day 3: Read Genesis 26:1-6

As we read through the accounts of Abraham and Isaac, we discover several parallels between them. Both had barren wives and were provided sons through God's intervention. Both received the covenant promises from God. Both set out for Egypt during famines. And both lied about their wives being their sisters. These parallels are so striking that some go so far as to question the historicity of the accounts. It just seems too convenient, too much like a literary device.

Genesis 26:1 anticipates this concern and addresses it head-on. The earlier famine Abraham experienced is referenced at the beginning of the one Isaac encountered, deliberately distinguishing the two. This is not a rehearsal of the earlier famine. This is not a literary device. This is history.

It is important that we understand the historical nature of the accounts of Abraham and Isaac. The shared patterns between father and son remind us of God's authority and power, but they also show us how one generation influences the next—for better or worse. Like Abraham, we all leave a spiritual legacy behind us. The question is what will its quality be?



How have others shaped your spiritual life? How are you shaping the spiritual lives of others?

Day 4: Read Genesis 26:7-11

Twice in his life, Abraham lied about his wife being his sister because he worried for his own life (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). In this passage, we see the son repeat his father's mistake, and once again the lie is exposed. What is interesting in this account is that the person who confronted Isaac for his lie was Abimelech, the same name of the king who confronted Abraham about his lie in Genesis 20. It is possible this was the same man, or it could have been a son or a grandson sharing the same name. Some believe "Abimelech" may have been a title, much like Pharaoh.

Regardless of who this Abimelech was, this repeated deception by Isaac shows us the hopelessness of finding an upright man through whom God would form His nation. Like Abraham, Isaac was not the answer humanity needed; he was a sinful man in need of a Savior himself. Even the greatest of patriarchs needed rescue—like us, they needed Christ, the Righteous One.



How have you lacked trust in God this week? Confess those times to God and turn those situations over to Him.

Day 5: Read Genesis 26:12-35

The Lord appeared to Isaac twice in Genesis 26. In verses 1-6, God gave him direction during the famine, and His appearance and reassurance of His promises first made to Abraham anticipated what follows in the narrative: Isaac lied about his wife because he was afraid for his life, even though God had just reminded him that He would be with him and bless him.

The second appearance by God followed Isaac's deception and a conflict over wells with the herdsmen of Gerar. This time when the Lord appeared to Isaac, He comforted him. Isaac did not have to be afraid; God was with him and would bless him. God's timing reveals His graciousness and mercy in His dealings with us. We might expect God to have come in discipline—Isaac had lied and was struggling to find water. But He didn't. He came with comfort and hope, reminding Jacob, and us, that His promises are based on His character, not ours.



How has God been gracious to comfort you, even in times when you did not deserve it?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God's promises are kept in unusual ways (Gen. 25:21-26).
- God's promises are given to unworthy people (Gen. 25:29-34).
- God's promises are based on His unchanging faithfulness (Gen. 26:1-6).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



What in recent memory has reminded you of God's faithfulness in spite of your unworthiness?



In what ways can we encourage one another to stay humble before God? To be confident in God's ability to fulfill His plans?

Notes
