Back to Bethel — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 12:7–13:4 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, November 5, 2023 · *Faith & Its Reward*

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Let's show the team a little love for leading us in worship through song this morning. It must be nice, Taylor. You can preach and sing. Some of us can do neither. So very grateful to have Taylor back leading worship this morning and our team, our band so gifted as usual. And I personally was just encouraged and helped by our time of worship together. I hope you were as well. Our passage this morning is going to be in the book of Genesis, chapter 12. So if you have your Bible, you can turn there.

If you're new to Broadview, you should bring your Bible. We preach through books of the Bible and if you want you can just buy the book of Genesis because we're going to be there for quite a little while longer. And so they make those little journal Bibles if you want to go get those and you can take notes in there, that's great. As you're turning there—they say never meet your heroes because they will disappoint you. I know that's certainly happened in my life before where I've met men and even on one occasion a woman that I admired and respected.

The closer you get to your heroes, the more you begin to realize that they are, even though they may be great men or great women, they are indeed merely human, and they will inevitably disappoint you. I remember as a young preacher starting out the first time that one of my hero preachers who I listened to all the time and I'd even kind of preach like him sometimes because I wanted to be so much like him—I remember the first time that there was a moral failure. He was one of those guys that failed morally, and I was devastated by the news and I thought, how can this happen?

I thought I was so deceived. How could I not see this? And with each passing year that I've been in ministry, you just see the headlines over and over and over. Moral failure after moral failure after moral failure, even from supposedly so-called men of God. And the truth is,

even godly men, even faithful men, even men who've committed their lives to ministry fail. Failure is part of being human because to be human is to have weaknesses. And some of you even this morning maybe struggle coming to church because in your life it was a Christian, so-called Christian, that offended you or grieved you in some way or another.

Maybe it was a pastor and so even coming to a place like this you are a little bit suspicious and standoffish because of that human failure. The truth is everybody fails, even godly men. And we're going to see that dynamic play out in a character this morning by the name of Abram. Our passage this series, this whole next chapter of our church family will be about studying this man and his journey of faith. And last week we left Abraham, he was kind of on the mountain high. And maybe you left last week thinking to yourself, well, I'll never be like Abraham.

Because he was worshiping God on the mountain. He was offering sacrifices. He was telling everybody about Jesus and worshiping no matter what. He was going into enemy territory, kicking over their altars, setting up the true altar to the true God. And you can kind of sense that and go, man, I just, I guess I'm one of those, you know, junior Christians. I'm not varsity league. I'm not like Abraham. But the truth is Abraham didn't stay that way very long. In fact, we're going to meet him today not on the mountain high but in the valley low.

God brings testing into our life. It's part of his plan for developing you into the person that you're going to be. And whether it's Abraham or preachers that we admire. Sometimes even the faithful fail the test. I titled the message "Back to Bethel" because we last left Abraham at Bethel. He is on that mountaintop, and we're going to see him this week go down into the southern regions. It's called the Negev. And he goes into the valley after leaving the Negev because of a famine and a testing that God brings into his life.

And he goes down into Egypt. And that season in Egypt is characterized by moral failure and spiritual compromise. And I think a lot of us will resonate with Abraham in that moment because we in our own lives have had seasons where we have drifted from the Lord and found ourselves in positions of moral and spiritual compromise. And the beautiful thing about this passage this morning is that even in those moments of faithful faithlessness, God is faithful to not only refine our faith and restore our reliance on him, but to actually bring us back home where we belong, back home to Bethel.

And so if you have your Bible, we're going to be in Genesis chapter 12. I'm going to start in verse 8 because that's where Abraham is on the mountaintop with the Lord at Bethel. It says, "From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. He built an altar to the Lord there"—circle that phrase, altar—"and he called on the name of the Lord." And so Abraham is on the mountaintop with God. God is good.

Life is good. Everything's going great. He's calling on the name of the Lord. He's walking by faith. He's worshiping every day. And we don't know how much time separates that moment from verse 9, but maybe some degree of time. But the truth is he didn't stay at Bethel. He didn't stay on the mountain, but he began to travel south. It says in verse 9 that "Abram journeyed by stages to the Negev." This word Negev, if you translate it in the Hebrew, it literally means dry southern region. Think desert. Think West Texas, but not Abilene.

Think like Midland, Odessa, El Paso. I put a map up here because who doesn't like a little map every now and then. Here's Bethel and Ai; he's right here on the mountaintop with the Lord. And gradually it said he made his way by stages to the Negev, so he's just going, you know, scene by scene, town by town, all the way down here to the Negev, this dry, desert-like southern region. It would have been hot, it would have been difficult. And I think the geographical description is also probably descriptive of Abram's spiritual condition.

Because we're going to see Abram instead of defaulting to prayerful dependence on the Lord and seeking God for guidance and worshiping and sacrificing, we're going to see him want to take matters into his own hand because the Negev presented him with a crisis. Look at verse 10: "There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to stay there for a while because the famine in the land was severe." Now when this passage says that the famine in the land was severe, the Bible's not exaggerating. It doesn't normally exaggerate.

We're talking—this is a word that means violent hunger. You've heard the phrase, I'm starving to death. This is literally starving to death. For him, he wouldn't have been able to like, okay, let's change the budget and maybe we can get on food stamps. This was do or die. This was an existential threat. Abram had nothing to eat, his family had nothing to eat, and there was no sign in the future of ever having anything else to eat. If they didn't do something, they were toast. And so what does he do?

He goes down to Egypt. Now the reason I point out this famine, and the reason I think it's important, is because we live in a world characterized by brokenness. And part of living in a broken world means there will be times when God brings famine into your life. It's just unavoidable. You will experience trials in this life. There is a form of teaching out there that says that trials are not unavoidable. There's this form of teaching out there that says if you'll just love God and worship God and go to church and give to my ministry, then God will bless you and He will give you your best life now and you'll never have to worry about anything and you can just name it and claim it and this health and wealth and prosperity kind of gospel gains traction in our world because it sounds great.

And in a way there is a little bit of truth to that gospel. There is truth because God is the designer of this world and God has presented a design in his word. And when you take the design of God and you live in his world according to his design, generally speaking, things will go better for you. If you do marriage God's way, your marriage will be better. And if you

do finances God's way, your money will be better. And if you do your workplace God's way, then all that seems to pan out better.

But just because life is better or life is good, it doesn't mean life is easy. Amen? Life is not easy. Life is hard, even for godly people. Sometimes especially for godly people. And so God brings a famine. I say God brings a famine, maybe. In one sense, God brought the famine because God is sovereign over the high tides and the low tides. But we don't know that this famine is punitive on Abraham. We don't know that God is saying to Abraham, "You bad boy, I'm going to, you know, throw the lightning bolt down from heaven and strike you until you get your act together."

That's not the vibe I get from this passage. And sometimes in your life your famine is not punitive. It's not God saying, "Well, because you did this when you were young, or because you weren't going to church or doing right, I'm just going to make your life miserable." Be very careful of assuming that every difficulty in your life is discipline from the Lord. We don't always know why trials come into our life. God may not be the cause of your trial. This trial might have been bugs. Or lack of rain or some other number of things.

God might not have caused the trial in Abraham's life, but God is inviting Abraham to be able to use that trial for his cause. And the same is true in our life. When God brings trials into your life, you may or may not know who is the direct cause of the trial, but God can use that trial for his cause in your life. You don't get to choose what you suffer, but you get to choose how you suffer. You don't get to choose when trials come into your life. I wish you did, but you don't.

But you do get to choose who you turn to when those trials strike. And the sad thing about Abraham is when this trial came into his life instead of depending on the Lord or praying to God—"Which way should I go, God? Should I go to Egypt or should I go back up to Bethel?" He doesn't do any of that. It seems as though Abraham's relationship with God had gotten a little bit calcified and dry and difficult, and so instead of seeking after God or allowing that pressure to take him to his knees, he pulls himself up by his spiritual bootstraps and says, "I'll take care of this.

"I'll go to Egypt." No consultation, no prayer, no nothing. And Egypt—there's a quote by F. B. Meyer, a good quote about Egypt. This is, I think, true throughout most of the scripture. Not everything in the scripture is metaphorical, but there are literary themes. And one of the literary themes around Egypt is that it is a place of worldliness. It's a place detached from the kingdom of God. I think Israel and the Exodus and all that. Egypt is also a symbol for relying on the flesh. Israel would often go to Egypt because they didn't want to rely on the Lord.

Egypt had the material prosperity, they had the wealth, they had the military prowess, they had the power, and so let's go there. And that's essentially what Abram's doing, and say, "I can't—God's not going to take care of this. I'll take care of this myself. And so I'm going to Egypt"—as an expression of leaning on his own strength, trusting in his own wisdom. And as F. B. Meyer says, "Egypt stands for alliance with the world and dependence on the arm of the flesh." And that's the most tragic thing about Abram's response.

And it's a warning to us that when God brings the test into your life, which will inevitably happen, don't lean on the flesh. Lean on the Lord. When you lean on the flesh, you're prone to find yourself in those dry desert regions. As the Lord says in the 23rd Psalm—if I let you lead me, and if I let you guide me, you lead me and guide me to green pastures and still waters, but when we let ourselves direct our own course, we end up in the dry desert regions. So God brings a test, Abraham leans on the flesh, and as a result, Abraham is going to find himself in a position of spiritual compromise and moral failure.

What do you do? What is your first impulse? When God brings a trial into your life, are you quick to say, "God, are you going to use this trial for your cause? How will you use this trial for your cause?" Or do you turn inward, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and solve the problem yourself? That's why it's such an awesome invitation for us on Sunday mornings like we just did to cast our cares on the Lord. The cares we cannot avoid but having, but we can do something with them when those trials come.

Abraham takes matters into his own hands. He goes down to Egypt, and look what happens. "When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, 'Look'"—which is a way of saying, "Hey, I want you to consider something. I know it may sound crazy, but just hear me out." "'I know what a beautiful woman you are'"—he's buttering her up—"'and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, This is his wife. And they will kill me, but they'll let you live. So please say you're my sister, so that it'll go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account.'" A couple things that are interesting about this.

Number one, Sarah at sixty-five years old is drop-dead gorgeous. So ladies, there's hope for you, right, if you're worried about becoming sixty-five. Now I say that— She lived to be a hundred and thirty, hundred and twenty something. So maybe there's not hope for you. I don't know. But she's about middle aged, she's looking good, she's got it going on, you know what I'm saying? And it's not just that she was physically attractive, although she was probably very physically attractive, she would have also been the matriarch. She's married to Abraham. She's got all the power and the money and the prestige.

And so Abraham's not wrong. What's he thinking though? What he's thinking, and this is just to give you a little bit of history—in ancient Near Eastern cultures, and even a little bit today in India, they still do arranged marriages. I think even in Israel they'll do arranged marriages—and when you as a father give your daughter off to be married, the dude that's

marrying your daughter is supposed to give you some money. Back then it was trade like cows or camels or other stuff. It was a way of saying, you're giving me your most precious gift, the least I can do is give you some cows.

Give you some money. And that's what Abraham's thinking. He's thinking, I know we're married. And what's crazy is technically she is his sister. If you look at Genesis chapter 20, verse 12,[1] I think it is, they have the same father but different mothers. Okay, so a little lie. And also kind of gross. I wouldn't recommend that. But they're technically sisters. And so Abram's thinking to himself, I think I want to give Abraham the benefit of the doubt. I don't think he was trying to lose his wife and pimp her out.

I think he thought, if I say that you're my sister, we're coming into this unknown territory, things are going to be difficult. We need friends. We need money. We need to kind of smooth the ramp-up to where we're going to be. So I'll say you're my sister. There will be suitors who come looking to marry you. I will keep them off, but while they're trying to marry you, they're probably going to be friendly towards us. And so like, oh, you want to marry my sister? Well, I'm open to that, but does anyone else want to be my friend?

That kind of thing? Like let's get some money, let's get some security, and it'll be great. Sounds like a great plan, doesn't it, ladies? No, it doesn't sound like a great plan. But every spiritual compromise in your life, take this to the bank. This is the anatomy of spiritual compromise. If you're in a place of spiritual compromise, I promise you it began with this: all spiritual compromise begins with a believable lie about how to escape. "Did God really say?" I know this isn't what I should do. I know technically speaking this is probably violating God's will, but this is the best solution I have right now.

I'm not going to let good be the enemy of, I'm not going to let the best be the enemy of the good. And so I know I've got to disobey God a little bit, but this will help me escape my problem. This will help me fix what's wrong. This will put food on the table. And besides, it's technically not a lie, but it's also technically not honest. All spiritual compromises begin small. Little believable lies. It'll be okay. And the other thing you see from this is that all spiritual compromise is motivated by fear and greed.

You notice what Abraham said when they're coming into Egypt. He says, I want you to say that you're my sister, because if they find out you're my wife, what are they going to do to me? They're going to kill me. And I don't want to die. And if you say you're my sister, we can kind of play this game and I can make money off of people, and then it will what? It'll go well for me. So if you do what I'm asking you to do, I don't have to be afraid of death, and we can actually get a little bit of money.

Greed and fear. Those are always a recipe for spiritual compromise in your life. In fact, if you go back in your life and you look at your greatest regrets and your most embarrassing

moments, I know this is true in my life, and if you look underneath the hood, what was I thinking? Why would I do that? Most times there is a little bit of fear and a little bit of greed under the hood motivating your madness. And that's what happens with Abraham. He was afraid to die. He was greedy for money.

And so he concocted this scheme to say, "Sarah, you're my sister."[2] But then look what happens. Verse 14: "When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was"—beautiful—"very beautiful." And then Pharaoh's officials saw her and they praised her to Pharaoh. And so what happens? The woman was taken to Pharaoh's household. And when it says the woman was taken to Pharaoh's household, what it means is she was taken into Pharaoh's bedroom. She became part of the harem. She is now literally getting pimped out by her husband to the most powerful man in Egypt.

Which is the third thing about spiritual compromise in your life. Whether you're a mom or a dad or a friend or a loved one, you can choose your sin, but you can't choose its consequence. All spiritual compromise has collateral damage. Usually collateral damage against the people you love the most. Usually, Dad, your spiritual compromise as the head of your home is impacting your wife and your children. Your little innocent thing that nobody knows about and you think it's just you and no more, it's totally private sin. It isn't private. Sin is never private, it always impacts the people that you love.

And Abraham, imagine Abraham in this moment. Assuming, giving the benefit of the doubt that he didn't see it coming, imagine the shame and the regret. And the brokenness. And imagine Sarah, who is now going to bed with the Egyptian king, the bedroom which most likely would not have been consensual nor pleasant. All because Abraham was leaning on the flesh instead of walking by the Spirit and allowed a little bit of fear and a little bit of greed to make a dumb decision that has now ruined his family. What about your compromises?

What about your greatest regrets? It almost always hits the people that we love. Our sin is never private. And the worst part about it is Abraham keeps the lie. Look at verse 16: "Pharaoh treated Abram well because of her." So his plan worked. He's getting all of this stuff from Pharaoh, "and Abram acquired flocks and herds, male and female donkeys, male and female slaves, and camels." I love that. And camels. So Abraham's living large. I got people to do my work for me. I don't have to go out in the field anymore.

I've got all of these sheep and goats and camels. Things are awesome. Why did he not say to Pharaoh, dude, that's my wife? All it would have taken is one moment of brutal honesty, but he doesn't do it. Why? Well you could say he was afraid for his life. He was afraid if he told Pharaoh the truth, Pharaoh would have him killed. Or maybe he liked that material prosperity. Maybe the money was a snare that kept him enslaved to doing what he knew he shouldn't be doing. And the reason I say that is because money, mammon, is one of Satan's most common snares for our lives.

One of the reasons I think some of us aren't doing what we know the Lord wants us to do is because of money. It'll cost too much. I'll have to sacrifice too much. Or maybe you'd say, God's calling me out, but God's given me all of this stuff. He's given me this amazing house. He's given me this wonderful life. Why would I give this up just to do this thing that I think God's calling me to do? Surely God's the source of my blessings. Why would he ask me to do this?

Maybe the Lord's not the source of your blessings. Maybe it's the enemy. Not all material prosperity is a blessing of God. Sometimes it's the snare of Satan, just like it was in Abraham's life. And so he's trapped, he's in a prison of his own making, ashamed, afraid. And the saddest part about all of it, and this is the fifth part about spiritual compromise, that snare from Satan had enslaved him into a prison where he was now blind to the promises and the plan of God. You remember Genesis chapter 12, verses 2 and 3: "I will bless you.

"I'll make your name great. You'll be a blessing. I'm going to bless the nations through you." He says in chapter 12, verse 7, "To you and your offspring, I will give this land." Look, Abraham, as far as you can see, the left, the right, up and down, I will give all of this land, not just to you, but to your offspring. He says this to a man without children who had been trying to have children, God has promised him offspring, and then he hits a little bit of a famine in his life.

Silly decision gets ensnared by that material prosperity and trap of Satan, and now he is totally blind to the promise and the plan of God. The woman through whom that promised child was going to come is now in Pharaoh's bed. The land that he was supposed to inherit is now uninhabited by him and his future offspring. And that's what Satan does in your life. He will get you to a point of spiritual compromise to produce spiritual failure in your life. Once he has that failure in place, he will snare you.

So that you will continue in that state of spiritual failure. And then the longer you stay in that state of spiritual failure, you'll become numb and numb to the purposes and plan of God in your life, and you will become blinder and blinder to his plan for your future. And I wonder how many Christians are off the field, disengaged, sitting on the bench because they're spiritually compromised and they feel like, "I don't have a way out. And even if I did have a way out, God wouldn't want to use me.

"I'm spoiled goods. I'm not useful to the kingdom." That's where Abraham is. Just like that may be where you feel like you are today. All it would have taken was one moment of brutal honesty. In one sense, to me, this story is encouraging because it's a reminder, even the great godly men fail. And so you're not alone. If you're struggling this morning and you feel like I am in a place of spiritual compromise, you are not alone. And you're not the only one. And the other thing that's encouraging about this story is that the Lord who promised Abraham that he was going to do something is faithful to keep his promise.

And even though Abraham wasn't going to pull himself out of the pit, and even though Sarah didn't have any resources to change her situation, the Lord in his sovereign power with his mighty hand does for Abraham and does for Sarah what they could not do for himself, even though he was faithless. The Lord was faithful. Look at it. Chapter 12, verse 17: "The Lord struck Pharaoh and his household." I think that means all the women he was sleeping with as well. What did he give them? "Severe plagues." Why? "Because of Abram's wife, Sarai."

I love this. It's not his sister. The Lord's like, I know it's not your sister, Abram. It's your wife. And so he strikes Pharaoh with plagues, he strikes the household with plagues, and Pharaoh figures out what's going on, and so he calls Abram and says, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife?" Now look at this: "Now here is your wife. Take her and go." It's the same exact Hebrew construction as chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, where it says, "Go," you, from your land and your relatives, out of your father's house.

Now, this pagan king is reminding Abraham of God's promise. What he's supposed to be doing, "Take her and go." "And then Pharaoh gave his men orders about him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that they had." So even though Abram had abandoned his wife, God was not abandoning Sarah. And even though Abraham was stuck in a prison of shame and regret, the Lord was not going to leave him there. He wasn't going to be honest, but the Lord would be honest for him: "And I will expose your sin, Abram."

What an amazing act of grace. Not only does he preserve Sarah in her captivity, there are people who say that maybe there wasn't ever any sexual union between Pharaoh and Sarah, maybe that plague hit and then they're like, "You know, I don't think we should be doing this with all the plagues going around." And so he's kind of protecting her from being compromised and essentially raped. And not only does he keep Sarah in her tribulation, but he's also exposing Abram in his sin. That's an amazing act of grace as well.

"Abraham, you won't be honest; I'll be honest for you." And he exposes him. And then to cap things off, not only does Abraham not get what he deserves, which is a severe beating and probably death for abandoning his wife. He gets his wife back, and grace upon grace, he gets to keep all of his money and leave Egypt unharmed. So God preserves Sarah. He exposes his sin and then he covers them with an amazing act of mercy and grace. And what's so crazy is in this story, Abraham's receiving these things through a pagan king, Pharaoh.

For you and for me, we can experience those same three things, not through a pagan king, but through the true king, the king of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who also keeps us in our famines and exposes us in our sin. I'll never forget growing up, I thought my nosy mother was a curse from God. I thought it was a curse. I thought she had a sixth sense. She could just know things. I don't know how she just intuited them and would ask probing questions at the least opportune moments and then boom, you're busted.

What an amazing gift of grace. There were times I should have been in prison or dead. In fact—statute of limitations—maybe some things I still don't want to be uncovered. There was seasons where I was running from the Lord. I was just like Abraham. I was blind to the promise and plan of God on my life. And grace upon grace exposed me when I needed it, when I wouldn't do it myself. And so your suspicious wife may be a gift of God. Your internet history getting exposed may be the best thing that ever happened to you.

Your financial calamity may be exactly what you need. It may be God's grace in your life because he's doing for you what you can't and won't do for yourself. And the best part about it is he doesn't, when he exposes you, he doesn't condemn you, he doesn't shame you, he doesn't say, "How dare you," although he has the right to say all of those things. In Jesus Christ, he says, "I will give you mercy and I will cover you with grace. You can be restored. You can be welcomed back. I will give you a new hope.

"I'll give you a new future, a new family. The plan hasn't changed." That's who our God is. Even for the failures. So, how do you receive that grace into your life? 2 Corinthians chapter 1 says that all of God's promises are yes and amen in Jesus. And so how do we receive the gift of that promise? Well if you look at chapter 13, there's a little pathway back home to Bethel. "The Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe pl—" I'm sorry, just chapter thirteen, verse one: "Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev—he, his wife, and all that he had, and Lot went with him.

"Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold"—the grace of God, giving him everything that he got from sordid gain. "He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been, to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram called on the name of the Lord there." So we begin with Abraham at Bethel. We see him return to the same place. How does he get back to Bethel? Four things. Number one, you've got to turn away from Egypt.

Some of you this morning are in Egypt. You are in the world. You are leaning on the flesh. You are in a place of spiritual compromise and when God in his grace, maybe through this message, the Holy Spirit is saying, wake up, stop it, repent. So this morning you're given an opportunity to turn away from Egypt. And then number two, turn back to Bethel. And notice he goes from stages up through the Negev. And so sometimes this part right here, getting back to God's house, which is what the word Bethel means.

It can take a minute. It can—getting back that communion with God and that relationship with God and getting rid of all of that sin in your life and all that stuff that feels like baggage. Progressive work, but it will take place. The third thing that Abraham does is he comes down to the altar, the same altar that he had offered sacrifices and burnt offerings and saying, "God, you are worthy of it all. I deserve death. I deserve the death that this animal's receiving, but he's receiving this death in my place.

"It is my substitute, and I now give you my life as a burnt offering in response to your grace and forgiveness and mercy." He goes back to the altar and then he calls on the name of the Lord. And so that's what I want to invite us to do this morning as Taylor's going to come up and lead us through a time of invitation. Restoring the intimacy that you have with your Heavenly Father is not difficult, or I'm sorry, it's not complicated, but it can be difficult. So for those of you here this morning who find yourself stuck in Egypt in a point of spiritual failure, your God is not wanting to keep you in your misery.

This morning may be his act of grace to say, I'm bringing you home, but you've got to do your part, which is to repent, turn away from Egypt, come back to me. And so this morning, I know this is a stage, but back in the day, this thing used to be called an altar. And they used to have these things called altar calls. And I know that it doesn't look like an altar anymore, but I want you to imagine this altar as the same kind of altar that Abraham came back to.

And what Abraham did in offering that burnt sacrifice is essentially saying, I surrender. I'm giving it back. I'm giving you my life. And you may need to do that this morning to come home. What the Lord wants from you is not better living first. He's not looking for you to clean yourself up first. He's looking for you to die to yourself and to surrender to him. And so this altar, coming down to this altar, is a powerful, picturesque way of saying, I'm yours. I'm yours. And then call on the name of the Lord.

It's just a way of saying, "God, I can't, but you can. Would you help me? Would you cover me with your mercy and grace? Would you deliver me? Would you save me? Would you forgive me?" If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, the same thing is what is true of all of us. The grace that saves us is the grace that sanctifies us. So if you've never received Jesus into your life as your personal Lord and Savior, then this altar is open for you as well. And I invite you to come down and say to me, I need to give my life to Jesus.

You know, I thought I was truly saved, but now I realize I was leaning on what I could do and not only on what God can do. And so I want to give my life to Jesus. I want to come home to the Father. And so if that's what the Lord's asking you to do this morning, I invite you to come. And then for all of us as a church family, do not get self-conscious about coming down to the altar. It's an amazing opportunity for every one of us to come back to the Father so that he might begin to use us afresh and anew for his purposes and plan.

If you don't want to come to the front, you don't have to, you can make that seat right there where you're seated an altar as well. But the altar is open. And so as the Lord leads, let's respond to Him. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you that even in our failures your mercy is more. And that your grace is greater than all of our sin. And so help us now, Lord, to be quick to confess. Quick to repent. That we wouldn't harden our hearts or deafen our ear to your voice, but that we would respond in a way that is proper and right based on who you are and what you're trying to do in our life.

We pray for those people here this morning who are in need of salvation, who need the saving grace of Jesus Christ to cover them, to cover their sin and to cover their brokenness and to give them a new hope and a new future. I pray you give them courage now to respond as we all respond in what you're calling us to do. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "Genesis chapter 20, verse 26"; Genesis 20 has 18 verses, and the statement that Sarah is Abraham's half-sister ("the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother") is Genesis 20:12. Source: Genesis 20:12 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "Sarah, you're my wife"; the scheme in Genesis 12:13 was for Sarai to say she was his sister ("Please say you're my sister"). Source: Genesis 12:11–13 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩