

Passing the Torch of Faith

Genesis 26:1–35 (ESV)

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: I hate commercials, well, let me rephrase that, I hate most commercials. I actually love the Progressive commercials — **“We can’t protect you from becoming your parents.”** There is an entire playlist of these things on YouTube.

- **Bathroom Talk** - Dr. Rick goes to the restroom, and the patient starts asking what he wants for lunch. He says, “Oh... boundaries”. “Tom,” says Dr. Rick, “Remember, when the door closes, so does the conversation”.
- **Getting Involved** - Dr. Rick says, “Young homeowners want to get involved in everything”, followed by one guy helping the stock boy do his job at the grocery store, another calling out the coffee order at a Starbucks.
- **Photo Op** - Even taking photos can be tough for young homeowners becoming their parents... then a guy in a park takes one more for safety, let’s do a fun one, hold up the building behind you.
- **Neighborhood Mayor** - Sally says to a neighbor, “The Thompsons’ door looks sharp, right?” Dr. Rick asks, “Did we need to wave her down to tell her that?”
- **Fire Pit** - Dr. Rick says, “ok, Noah’s going to make a fire, our job is to let him do it by himself”. Greg turns to Noah and says, “What kind of wood you got there”?

Punchline is always the same: “At Progressive, we can’t keep you from turning into your parents, but we can help you bundle on car insurance.”

While those are my favorite commercials, the truth is the next generation is not becoming their parents in terms of faith. Genesis 26 speaks to how we can pass the Torch of Faith to the next generation.

INTRODUCTION: Genesis 26 focuses on the life and legacy of **Isaac**. Isaac is an interesting character. You see, his father, **Abraham**, received 14 chapters devoted to his story, and Isaac’s son, **Jacob**, received 24 chapters devoted to his story. His grandson **Joseph** received 14 chapters dedicated to his story. Yet Isaac has only one chapter, 26, dedicated to his life story. **Isaac is a transitional patriarch.**

Some of you are transitional believers. Your parents are first-generation followers of Christ, and they have sought to pass the faith on to you; you will be responsible for passing it on to the next generation. In today’s text, we learn that the key to receiving the faith and passing it on is to trust that God is with you through the same challenges your parents faced. The major question for Isaac will be: will he be able to embrace the walk of faith for himself, and will God be *“WITH”* Isaac as He had been with Abraham?

You see, the next generation will have the: Same gospel. Same Lord. Same mission. But a very different context.

CONSIDER THE CHALLENGES YOUNG CHRISTIANS WILL FACE IN THE DAYS AHEAD:

1. There is a Different *Economy*

. These kids were born into economic chaos, and they've never known anything else.

The Great Recession hit in 2007–2009, the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression. Unemployment hit 10%. Families lost homes. Retirement accounts got gutted. And Gen Z was in diapers or elementary school when it happened.

Listen to this fresh 2025 data from the Cato Institute/YouGov survey:

- 62% of Americans 18–29 now say they have a favorable view of socialism. Sixty-two percent! That's not a fringe. That's the majority of an entire generation. And it's climbing every single year.
- Most of us were taught the dangers of Socialism and Communism in high school. This generation is born into a United States where a Democratic Socialist can be elected Mayor of the Largest City in our Nation.

What we considered abnormal, this generation will experience as the new normal.

A Different Economy...

2. There is a different *Environment*

This is the first generation in human history that has never known a single moment of true solitude. They don't remember life before the smartphone. The internet isn't something they log on to – it's the air they breathe.

- Average screen time for Gen Z? Over 9 hours a day outside of schoolwork. Nine hours!¹ The digital world isn't a tool for them – it's their habitat. They don't "log on" — they *live on*.

A Different Economy...A different environment...

3. There are different *Ethical Challenges*

This generation has been taught: Gender is fluid, Marriage is flexible, Truth is about personal perspective, and Identity is self-invented

ILLUSTRATION: Consider this: The UK — through its regulatory authorities — has

¹ https://www.magnetaba.com/blog/average-screen-time-statistics?utm_source=chatgpt.com

legally permitted a reproductive technology that results in children having DNA from three people: what's commonly called "three-parent IVF." [CBS News+2Al Jazeera+2](#) This technique, often referred to as Mitochondrial replacement therapy (MRT), was legalized in the UK in 2015. [Scientific American+1](#) According to a 2025 report, eight healthy babies have now been born in the UK via MRT (i.e. with mitochondrial DNA from a donor, plus nuclear DNA from the two biological parents). [STAT+1](#)

Previous generations (Boomers, Gen X, early Millennials)

Had at least *residual* Judeo-Christian categories: sin, truth, marriage, gender, God, personal responsibility, eternity. Even if they weren't believers, the framework was familiar. You could preach "return to God," and they understood the reference point.

Gen Z

Often has no shared vocabulary with historic Christianity. Terms like "sin," "holiness," "male/female," or even "truth" don't land the way they used to. The faith must often be ***explained*** before it can be ***proclaimed***.

Previous generations

Had an innate trust in institutions: church, pastors, Scripture, parents, tradition. Even skeptics assumed the pastor was at least trying to tell the truth.

Gen Z

Assumes institutions are corrupt until proven otherwise. Pastors are viewed with suspicion. "Because the Bible says so" is meaningless without showing why the Bible is trustworthy. Faith transmission must be relational, transparent, and credible, not merely positional.

CONTEXT: With this in mind, look at Gen. 26 with me - Chapter 26 gives us three experiences in the life of Isaac. Why these three? What are we to understand?

Three Keys to Passing the Torce of Faith:

1. Be Honest About Your Failures

Genesis 26:1–35 (ESV)

¹ Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham.

A fresh famine struck—echoing Abraham's era and foreshadowing Jacob's, which landed the tribes in Egypt. It's a recurring cycle.

In Bible days, famines meant crop failure, starving livestock, skyrocketing food prices —like today’s recessions: scarce jobs, soaring costs, high inflation, and widespread financial strain.

Financial Fiascos:

- **Magnify Tension:** Home squabbles explode into full-blown conflicts. Most marital counseling I’ve done traces back to money woes.
- **Multiplies Temptations:**
Weakened Willpower Against Escape Routes: Temptations like addiction or avoidance intensify.
- **Moves us Toward Bad Solutions:**
Desperate Grasps at Quick Fixes: For Isaac, Egypt beckoned—the Nile’s reliable waters drew desperate nations. It was his instinctual escape.

But look at the end of verse 1...

1b And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and **I will be with you and will bless you**, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

So Isaac is faced with the same temptation as Abraham - to flee to Egypt. Why Egypt? Egypt was a more developed civilization - famines didn’t hit them quite as hard, and they were able to amass massive stockpiles of grain for the times in which they did.

What did Abraham do when faced with a famine? He went down to Egypt.

God shows up and tells Isaac - ***Don’t do what your Father did, and thankfully, Isaac listens.***

Don’t you hope your kids don’t repeat your mistakes? For that to happen, you have to be honest about your failure.

An effective parent is transparent. Share wins but also losses.

- A hidden mistake becomes a **generational landmine**.
- A confessed mistake becomes a **generational warning sign**.

Your kids will either repeat what you conceal or learn from what you reveal.

When you tell your children:

- “Here’s where I blew it.”
- “Here’s what it cost me.”
- “And here’s what God taught me.”

...you aren't losing authority; you're gaining credibility.

They realize:

"Dad isn't lecturing me from a pedestal — he's guiding me from experience."

When parents only talk about their successes, a child grows up thinking:

- "Mom always did it right. Something must be wrong with me."
- "Dad never struggled. Why am I struggling?"

That creates pressure, not wisdom.

ILLUSTRATION: Billy and Ruth Graham's daughter tells how difficult marriage was for her, and she wondered why it hadn't been for her parents. After going through a very difficult divorce she called her mother and said, "Mom, it wasn't like with you and daddy, you guys never fought". Her mother laughed out loud and said, "What gave you that idea"? To which the daughter replied, "I never heard you and daddy fighting", to which Ruth answered, "That's because we hid our fights from you, we meant well, but perhaps we should have been more transparent about our struggles".

When you also share your losses, you're teaching them that failure isn't final.

Zig Ziglar said, *"Remember failure is an event, not a person, and yesterday really did end last night".*

If we are going to pass our faith on to the next generation, we are going to have to tell them where we blew it. *Our transparency today becomes their discernment tomorrow.*

Be honest about your failures...

2. Be Thorough in Your Repentance

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance.

Now that sounds familiar, doesn't it? It's the same thing Abraham did a generation earlier. But this is even worse... At least it was half true for Abraham - it's a bald-faced lie for Isaac.

⁸ When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. ⁹ So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.' " ¹⁰ Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

Abraham lied about Sarah twice.
 Isaac lies about Rebekah once.
 Same location. Same fear. Same excuse. Same king. Same sin.

Isaac wasn't even born when Abraham lied about Sarah. He didn't see it with his own eyes — but somehow he *learned* it.

Why?

Because our children don't inherit only our genetics. They inherit our *patterns*.

Our fears. Our reflexes. Our shortcuts. Our sin tendencies — *unless we break them*.

Abraham's unaddressed fear becomes Isaac's instinctive response. **What parents cover, children copy.**

Abraham never seems to sit Isaac down and say:

"Son, let me tell you about the times I blew it in Gerar. Let me tell you what fear does to a man. Let me tell you why that road is deadly."

Parents, your kids need to know:

- where you struggled
- What it cost you
- How God rescued you
- and why you'll never go down that road again

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. **The Lord blessed him,** ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.

Be honest about your failures... Thorough in your repentance...

3. Clear About Where You Found Water

Notice how the heart of Isaac begins to turn toward God at this point...

¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them.

Wells represent survival in the ancient world.

If you didn't know where the water was, you didn't last long in the wilderness.

Water meant: life, strength, refreshing, stability, a future

So when Isaac reopens Abraham's wells, it's a picture of generational discipleship:

He's rediscovering the sources of strength his father relied on. He's finding water where Abraham found water.

Your kids don't just need your rules — they need your wells.

They need to know:

- How did you pray when the bottom fell out
- Which Scriptures held you together
- Which Preachers did God use to speak truth to you
- How did God carry you through fear, doubt, money trouble, marriage strain, grief, and temptation

If all they inherit is your **behavior**, they will fail.

If they inherit your **sources**, they will stand.

You **SOURCE** is more helpful than your **OPINION**. Your opinion will die with you, your source will water 1000 generations.

That is the major problem with this generation: they are dehydrated souls, looking for water, because we didn't tell them where the wells were.

But when a parent says:

"This is where God met me."

"This is the Scripture I clung to."

"This is the church that held us up."

"This is the habit that kept me sane."

"This is the story of how God provided when we had nothing."

—you're marking out the spiritual wells on the map of their lives.

Have you told your kids where you found water?

Let me say a word to those of you in the next generation. There is something about wells; the enemy tends to keep filling them up. That is why Isaac had to dig them again.

We can help you - but we can't dig the well for you. You need your own encounters with God. You need you own battles with the enemy.

¹⁹ But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰ the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah.

²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." ²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, **for I am with you** and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

²⁶ When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuz-zath his adviser and Phi-col the commander of his army, ²⁷ Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" ²⁸ They said, "**We see plainly that the Lord has been with you....**"

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

I began by saying that the Hebrew text communicates through repetition. Do you know what phrase is most often repeated throughout this text? "God was with him". You see, God will be with the next generation, just like He has been with us, but we must - *Be honest about your failures... Thorough in your repentance... and be clear about where we found the water.*

Perhaps today, some of us need to have a long talk with our kids. What if this holiday season, you didn't give your kids a guilt trip? What if you have them a few wells?