

Is God Faithful to Families for Generations?

- All right, who's ready for a high impact, high energy sermon?

- [Congregation] Woo

- All right, okay, let me lower your expectations, that's not gonna happen. Last week was Easter, which was our biggest event we've ever had, and going into Easter, it's like the flight to Vegas, woo, the week after Easter's like the flight home from Vegas, and so we're all just a little half speed, but I'm gonna do my best. We had an incredible weekend, probably next year we're gonna need to go off campus, if you think about it, just pray that God would give us a good room that would be large enough to get everybody together at one time as we've outgrown our property. And usually what happens after Easter is smart, wise, calculated pastors start brand new, interesting felt need series, which probably would've been a good idea, but we're gonna stay in the book of Genesis. I go through books of the Bible and this week we hit chapter 17, we see the first circumcision in the Bible. So let me just tell you it's gonna be awkward, and if you woke up this morning and you thought, I hope we're talking about circumcision, two things, number one, prayer answered, and number two, you're a weirdo. So we're in Genesis, you're truly a weirdo, so we're in Genesis chapter 17, and we're gonna look at this couple, Abraham and Sarah, they're one of the most significant, influential couples in the history of the world. 4,000 years later, the Arabs descend from Abraham, the Jews descend from Abraham, and the Christian spiritually descend from Abraham. And so to state their significance in history, it would be difficult to overstate, because of their significance and importance. And as we get into it today, we're gonna look at their relationship with God and one another, as a family, and if I had to give you one word to just remember and focus on, it's this word, covenant, and we're gonna talk largely about covenant today. The word covenant appears in Genesis 27 times, 13 occasions in chapter 17. So 13 times in one chapter, it tells us the word covenant, which means that's the theme. I went to public school and I could even figure that out, it's that obvious as we get into Genesis 17. So we'll just jump right in. First we're gonna look at covenant relationship with God. This is a unique kind of relationship, only available to the Christian through Jesus Christ. Genesis 17:1-8, When Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said to him, so our God is a living God, and he's a speaking God, and he said to him, I am God almighty, that name literally means El Shaddai, walk before me, so your relationship with God is like a walk with God, and be blameless, follow some instructions, that I may make my covenant, there it shows up and it's gonna keep reappearing, between me and you, and may multiply you greatly, so there's blessing for he and his family for generations, then Abraham fell on his face, so he is gonna worship God and honor God, and God said to him, behold, my covenant, there it is again, is with you, and also your family, you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. "No longer shall you be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I've made you the father of a multitude of nations." "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings will come from you." Just so you know, all the Arab nations come from Abraham and the nation of Israel comes from Abraham, all of these promises have come true. And I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring, or your children, after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring

after you, I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, the land of Canaan, we now know that as the promised land or Israel, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. So here's the big idea, God shows up and he's gonna say something to Abraham, and what he's gonna say is, here's your destiny and future. You need to know, God has a destiny for you, God had a destiny for him, God has a destiny for you. For God, the future is not open, it is closed, it is not uncertain, it is established, and the God who knows what the future holds can prepare us for that future. That's why in a day like ours, where everything is just uncertain, good luck peering into the future and trying to figure out where global conflict and the economy and presidential cycles and all of the craziness of our world, it's impossible to look into the future and try and make any sort of long range plan, 'cause there's no way to anticipate what happens next in our weird world. The good news is there is a God who's over it all, he sees and knows the future, he rules and reveals the future, and if we meet with him, he can lead and guide us into a future that we don't know, but that he does, and that's what he does here for Abraham, he's saying, okay, son, here's my plan for you, here's your destiny and the path that I have chosen for you. And it all hinges on his covenant relationship with God. And the big idea is this, your relationship with God is your first priority, and once you have a covenant relationship with God, then you're ready to have a covenant marriage and raise covenant kids. That's where ultimately this instruction to Abraham is gonna go, we've hit this briefly, let me revisit it quickly. A covenant is a very unique relationship. It's one that we don't really understand, because almost all of our relationships are contracts, not covenants, and in a contract, you've gotta earn it, but in a covenant, it's just given to you as a gift. In a contract, you can lose your relationship if you don't perform according to deal terms, in a covenant, that relationship is secure no matter what, because a contract is really two sided, a covenant is largely one sided, it's God who preserves it and makes it happen. And so when it comes to covenant, Abraham has this covenant relationship with God, and I've hit it before, but in various English translations, it's translated as God's love, his loving kindness, his mercy, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, commitment, and reliability. Now, God does have a general love for all people, but he has a fierce, passionate, focused love for his people, God loves everyone, but in a unique and special way he loves his kids, in the same way, I love people, but I really love my wife and kids. They have first place in my affection and devotion, so it is with God. The Jesus storybook Bible calls this the never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking always and forever love. Here's what I want you to know friends, if you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, he can't love you any more. There's no love that he's restrained from you. There's no portion of his affection that he is making you work for and achieve. In addition, there's nothing you can do to make God love you any less. And sometimes on our bad days, satan whispers in our ear and says, oh, look at what you've done, God must be disappointed in you, maybe he's even done with you, the truth is that's never his heart, because his commitment to you is not predicated on your performance, but on his pleasure. And here's what I need you to know, some of you are Christians, and as I was praying for you on the way in, I felt like God wanted me to share this with you, and so maybe this is for you. Some of you believe that there is love and grace and mercy and affection and devotion for others, but you struggle to believe that it's also available for you. And sometimes what we tend to do is we tend to understand God's love as it applies to others, and we tend to struggle to really receive the love of God for ourselves. And this is really God saying,

we have a one way love, my love goes to you, and ultimately I want it to go through you to others, but it's not contingent on you being a person who performs, but me being a person who sent my Son, Jesus Christ to perform. So let me explain to you how this works. We have a problem with God, or I should say that God has a problem with us, we've all sinned, we brought death into the world. There are only really three ways that this could play itself out, number one, we can fix the problem, and they call that works and it never works. The problem with works, it never works, because there's nothing we can do to make up to God what we have failed to do. There's no way that we can close the gap between us and God. So that leaves two options, number one, God could just leave us in our separated, fallen condition of sin, we could just all die and go to hell and you reap what you sow, that's what you've earned so that's what you get. The third option is God said, you know what? I'm going to love those who don't love me, I'm going to pursue those who don't pursue me, I have a heart for those who don't have a heart for me. And so the Father and the Son devised a plan that he would come into human history, but he would live a life without any sin, the life that we were supposed to live, but have failed to live, and that he would die to pay our price of debt to God for sin. And that he would rise three days later to conquer death and to forgive sin. And so ultimately all this talk that we're gonna get into in Genesis about fathers and sons, the whole point is that the father would send his Son, and that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is gonna come through Abraham and his son Isaac, and ultimately they're going to bring forth the nation of Israel that will bring forth Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and when it talks a lot about kings in this section, it's ultimately pointing us to Jesus Christ coming as the King of kings. So here's the big idea, if everything that needed to be done was done on the cross of Jesus, there's nothing for you to do to earn God's love, and there's nothing you can do to unearn God's love, 'cause you didn't earn it. This is just a mind blowing concept. And what it means is this friend, that if you are in Jesus Christ, God's love for you is not at the finish line, it's at the starting line. You don't work for God's love, you work from God's love. I think the closest we ever get to this is having a child. How many of you are parents, you've got a kid? How many of you, the first time you held your kid, you just love them? The question is, what did they do? Nothing, well, what benefit do they bring? Actually I'm exhausted, they keep me up all night, they yell at me at three o'clock in the morning, I tend not to love people that do that. And every time I embrace them, they poop on me, and when people yell at me and poop on me, my first response is not usually, I love you. And I find you a blessing, in fact, those kind of people are my former relationships, I don't tend to pursue them, but when you hold your kid, even though they're yelling at you and they're pooping on you, you love them because the relationship is, it's one way, they can't communicate, but you can, they don't understand, but you do, they can't give anything, so you give everything. God is a Father, you are his sons and daughters, the way he feels about you is similar to a healthy parent, but in a perfect way. And so when God shows up to Abraham, he starts by saying, we are in a covenant relationship, and that covenant relationship, then it's something that serves as the pattern for how Abraham is supposed to treat his wife, and then how Abraham and Sarah are supposed to treat their son, Isaac, who is coming. Let me say this, then God changes his name from Abram, which means exalted father, to father of a multitude, which is Abraham, and God tells him, your son is coming, they've been waiting around 25 years for a son. God said, you're gonna have a son, they waited, they waited, they waited, they didn't wait perfectly. Sarah came up with a crazy

idea, and that was, hey, I'm barren, we're elderly, the son hasn't come, why don't you take a second wife, get her pregnant, have a kid with her, what could possibly go wrong? Well, everything could go wrong. And so he has two wives, which is too many, they end up having two sons, which is too many, and the result is that there's going to be a lot of division and conflict even for 4,000 years, but ultimately God says, my promise is true, and I need you to know there's two things, friend, there's God's will, and God's timing. And I've said this repeatedly in Genesis, some of the greatest mistakes I've made in my life is I knew God's will, but I got ahead of God's timing. And that's what Abraham and Sarah did, God said, I'm gonna give you a son, they're like, great, and God basically was waiting 25 years, and they said, you know what? That seems like a long time, we need to rush this. Let me say this, if you get ahead of God's will, you're in a dangerous place, and you cause harm to yourself and others, and they got impatient, but God is here telling them it's gonna be one year, so he sets a finish line for them to run toward. And what he says is that he's going to give them a son and that through that son will come the nation of Israel and that they will occupy the land of Canaan. This is what we would now today call the promised land. And the big debate was this, Abraham had two wives, shouldn't have, he had Sarah as first wife, Hagar as second, he had Ishmael, his son who was born first, Isaac, who was born about 13 years later, and a promise was given that the son of Abraham would inherit the promised land, so the big debate today is, who owns that piece of real estate, true or false? It's still a bit of a global conflict who owns that piece of real estate. Surrounding are Arab nations that descend from Ishmael, and occupying it is the Jewish nation that descends from Isaac. According to this promise from God, it belongs to the Jewish people. And I know that's controversial and for me, I don't care, that's my second spiritual gift, I don't care, but at the end of the day, I'm not saying that all the Jews love Jesus, in fact, sadly, most in Israel don't, I'm not saying that there are many Arabs that don't love Jesus, there are lots of Arabs that do love Jesus, I'm not saying that everything that's going on in the Middle East is Godly, right, and good, but according to this, that piece of dirt belongs to the people who descend through Isaac from Abraham, it belongs to the Jewish people. And what God tells Abraham is this, before your son comes, and your kids, and your grandkids, and your great grandkids, the first priority for you, and it needs to be the first priority for you and I, is your walk with God. He says, I want you to walk with me. A lot of times, Christians will talk about our personal relationship with God, and I want you to have a personal relationship with God, but it should involve other persons. Like I'm a Christian, my wife and my kids, it's part of my walk with God, and you are too, I'm your pastor, in addition, sometimes Christians will talk a lot about giving your life to the Lord, but it's a big thing to continue walking with the Lord. You can give your life to the Lord one day, but walking with the Lord is something that we do every day, it's relationship. And so the Bible uses this language of a walk with God to describe a relationship with God, it said that Adam walked with God, that Enoch walked with God, that Noah walked with God, and here Abraham is walking with God. Couple things I wanna say about this, number one, becoming a Christian is the first step. You say, well, where do I start? Receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He takes away all of your sin, and he gives you the one way love of God so that you can have a covenant relationship with God through Christ. For me, my first step was age 19 in College, I became a Christian, that's the first step, that's where you enter into the covenant relationship. And if you would like to do that today, there's gonna be a prayer team in

the back, or if you're watching online, just let us know so we can pray for you, and we can help you come into that personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And then what's really important after you take your first step, is the rest of your life just keep trying to figure out what's my next step. And some of you get really discouraged, because you look into the future and you say, you know what? I should be further along, I should be more mature, I should have made more progress, I want to encourage you, look back and look at how far you've come. And sometimes satan only wants to tell us, you didn't go as far as you should, and God wants us to look back and say, you are going the right direction and making progress, so don't get discouraged, be encouraged and keep going. And let me just say this, every one of us is not where we should be, but by God's grace, we're not where we were. And so just your walk with God is simply this, have you gotten off course? Well, what's your next step to get back on course? And it could be very practical, some of you it's like, do you need a Bible? Do you need somebody to pray for you? Do you need to just get connected to the church family and meet some good friends and have some good community? Do you need to make some new lifestyle choices? Do you need to make a budget? Do you need to break up with your non-Christian boyfriend? Yes, it's just some practical things like that. That's my inner dad leaking, but what is your next step? And so when you go for a walk with someone, the key is to stay together, and to talk and listen. One of my favorite things to do with my wife, Grace, is go for a walk, it's one of my favorite things. And every week I tend to do a prayer hike up in the mountains, I literally walk with God. I'll go five, 10, whatever miles, I'll hike into rivers, lakes, whatever I can find, and I talk to God, it is literally walk with God, it is literally a prayer walk with God, my soul needs that. This week, Grace joined me, my wife, and so we're walking together. And a couple of things that's important to note, we walk together, if you see a couple not walking together, they're not doing good, so we're in the woods, we're walking together and what we do, we hold hands so that we stick together and we talk and we listen to build our relationship. That's what your walk with God is, it's getting up in the morning and saying, okay, I need to talk with you today, I need to hear from you today, I need to walk with you today, please show me the steps that you would have for me. So this is his covenant relationship with God, and then that's going to translate into covenant marriage and covenant family. The way God treats you is the way you're supposed to treat your spouse and your kids, he loves you, love them, he pursues you, you pursue them, he forgives you, you forgive them, that relationship informs and directs all other relationships. So here we go, covenant family, Genesis 17:9-21, "God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.'" The goal is that every generation would continue to walk with God. "This is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you." It's a covenant family. Okay, here we go, oh boy, all right. Every male among you shall be, what's it say, circumcised, you don't know what that means, do not Google it, do not Google it. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, how many of you glad you don't have my job right now? You're like, yeah, yeah, I'm good, I wonder what he's gonna say, he does too, pray for him, he's only got a few minutes to figure it out, and it shall be a sign, so we'll talk about covenant signs after this, between me and you. "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised." So when Isaac is born, he's circumcised on the eighth day. Not only that, "Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not your offspring, both

he who is born in your house and he who is born with your money, shall surely be circumcised." How many of you are like, that's when I move. You're like, that's when I move. "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant." "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off." It's like, I'll cut you off. "He has broken my covenant." And God said to Abraham, as for your wife, Sarai, which means contentious, her name will be changed to Sarah, which means princess. "I will bless her, and moreover give you a son by her." I will bless her, she shall become nations, which has happened, kings of people shall come from her, ultimately leading to Genesis 49:10, where it promises that Jesus would come as the King of kings, then Abraham fell on his face and he what? He laughed, we'll talk about that, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?" "Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear child?" How many of you women are 90 and you're like, yeah, I don't wanna start having kids right now? And he's 100, I mean, it's like diapers for everybody. And so, and Abraham said to God, oh that Ishmael, that's the son that he had with the maid servant, Hagar, might live before you, so he does love his now 13 year old son, God said, no, but Sarah your wife shall bear a son, you shall call his name Isaac, Isaac means laughter, 'cause God always gets the last laugh. Sarah laughed at God, Abraham laughed at God, God laughed at them both, and got the big last laugh. "I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him." As for Ishmael, the other son, his name means the Lord hears, I have heard you, behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly, he's gonna be blessed too. He shall father 12 princes, that is the counter to the 12 tribes of Israel through Isaac, and I will make him into a great nation. "But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year." So you got one year, baby's on the way. And so here, the big idea is this, first of all, the promise is made that through Abraham and his wife, Sarah, would come Isaac. Why is it important that Isaac would come? Because ultimately, through Abraham's son would come God's son. The whole point here is to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. You need to know that the whole point of Scripture is to understand and love Jesus Christ. The whole point of history is Jesus Christ. The whole point of everything, the center of everything is Jesus Christ. And sometimes people will come to the Bible, people who are in cults, or maybe they're in Judaism, and they'll just turn it into what is called moralism, moralism is here's the good things, here's the bad things, do the good things, don't do the bad things, the story's actually a lot bigger than that, 'cause it's not primarily about us, here's what you need to know, the Bible is for you, but it's not primarily about you, it's about Jesus, and he is for you, and once you know him, you understand what he's done for you. There's a day in John 5 when they come to Jesus and they wanna argue with him about the Bible, and he says, you diligently study the Scriptures thinking that in them you'll have eternal life, yet you fail to recognize the whole point of the Scriptures is to testify about me. So as we get into the storyline and we see covenant and circumcision, and husband, and wives, and kids, get above the story and say, why is this important? 'Cause it's gonna lead to the nation of Israel that'll lead to the coming of the Son of God, through Isaac, the son of Abraham. And what we see here as well is he's got two sons, one is chosen for the covenant promise, that is Isaac, the other is not, that is Ishmael, but does God still bless Ishmael? Yeah, now he's not saved, but he's blessed. Blessing is in this life, saved is blessing that extends into eternal life. And so Ishmael doesn't love the Lord, but the Lord still blesses

him. You need to know if you're not a Christian, you're not going to heaven, but the blessing in your life is still from God. I didn't know this until I knew the Lord, I just thought in my life I was lucky, fate favored me or I figured some things out, once I met the Lord, I realized all the good stuff that was in my life, even before I knew the Lord, it came from the Lord. God blessed me, God was gracious to me, God was generous to me, and it didn't mean that I had a relationship with him, but it meant that his disposition toward me was still kind and loving. So ultimately, even though Ishmael is not saved, he is blessed by God, and he's loved by his father. And so what's gonna happen next is this covenant of circumcision is going to establish the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel does not exist up until this point. You may not know this, getting a little technical, be your nerd friend, Abraham is a Gentile, he's not a Jew. There are no Jewish people until he circumcises himself and his household, that becomes the inauguration of the Jewish people. So he's a Gentile like the rest of us, and then here, the covenant sign points to the coming of Jesus, so let's jump forward real quick. Covenant signs, when he had finished talking with him, Genesis 17:22-27, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, all those born in his house are bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was 99, that's faith, doing that at 99, when he was circumcised, the flesh of his foreskin, and Ishmael, his son was 13, true or false, a 13 year old son can outrun a 99 year old father? When I get to heaven, I'm gonna ask why that didn't happen. "And Ishmael his son was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin." And I want you to see the immediate obedience of Abraham. Sometimes God tells us to do something and we wait a long time, and we need to act quickly, "That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised." And all the men in his house, this is hundreds, maybe thousands, those born in the house, and those bought with money from a foreigner were circumcised with him. So here, what you see is, a covenant has two things, it has a head and a sign, and what a sign does it points the people in the covenant to the future. So for example, previously there was a covenant with Noah, he was the head, what was the sign of the Noahic covenant? It's a rainbow, it's been hijacked. And now what we see here, the head of this covenant is Abraham and the sign is circumcision. And again, the point of a sign is to point into the future of a greater reality. So let me try and explain this as best I can. Let me ask one question and then we'll get into the details. So did Abraham have the sign of the covenant and then faith in and relationship with God, or did he have a relationship with God and faith in God, and then later have the sign? What came first, the sign or the relationship? Relationship, because he's been a believer for 25 years, and then there was circumcision. So the point, it's kinda like today, you could be a Christian for 25 years and then get baptized. And so what happens is a sign comes after the relationship. Now what happens sometimes is people will come along and they will say, well, we need to baptize our children and we need to baptize them when they're little, but the point is no, actually you shouldn't, what we do at our church, we dedicate the children when they're little, 'cause that is the faith of their parents, and the parents are saying, we're gonna raise our children in a covenant family to know and love and serve the Lord. But then when the child gets older and they have their own personal faith and relationship with God, then we baptize them. We wait for the relationship, and then we have the sign that points to the relationship. I'll give you an example, Grace and I are married, this year we'll be married 30 years, and we have a covenant of marriage. Christians think in terms of covenant,

non-Christians don't even know what we're talking about. Grace and I are in a covenant of marriage, and for us that means it's not just her and I, it's the Lord who's over us both. So we both need to listen to the Lord, pray to the Lord, follow the Lord, honor the Lord, that ultimately the highest authority in our marriage is not me and it's not Grace, it's him. And our goal is to find his will and to walk in it, and that's our hope and prayer, but our covenant also has a sign, what's the sign of our covenant? It's a wedding ring. And let me ask you this, do you wear the wedding ring when you're single, before you meet your spouse? If you answer yes, you're weird and confusing. Why do we put the ring on the finger at the wedding? 'Cause what we're saying is this sign points to this relationship. And what it says is I'm in a covenant. There's somebody that I'm in relationship with that I'm not in relationship with anyone else. And I have intimacy, and unity, and devotion to that person in a way I don't anyone else. And it tells everyone else that kind of relationship, you can't have with me, because it's sacred, it's a covenant. So just like we wear our wedding ring once we're married, we baptize people once they're Christians. And then the question becomes, what about this issue of circumcision? So since you brought it up, let me talk about it. Just one thing to note, so when was, for those of you who are paying attention, when was Isaac circumcised? Eighth day, so to this day, 4,000 years later, the Jews baptized or they don't baptize, they circumcised their son's on the eighth day. Jesus Christ was circumcised on the eighth day. As was you, when was Ishmael circumcised? Age 13. I was thinking about that here, okay, so to this day, the Arabs circumcise their sons, 4,000 years later, at age 13. You should see the face of every man. It's just the whole room turned into a Scooby Doo app, it's arrrr, row row, row row, row row, glitch. And the point is this, it's amazing sometimes when you start something, how a tradition can go in your family for generations, and if it's a good tradition, that's a good thing, if it's a bad tradition, it's a bad thing, but 4,000 years later, this is still occurring. So what's really curious about this, let's talk about circumcision, 'cause I got nothing else to do. If you think about it, it's odd, you gimme that? How many of you men, you're like, yeah, I agree with that? So, okay, I'm not a Christian, but I agree with that point. So what happens is can a male and a female have a covenant relationship with God? Yes, but the sign here is only for the men. And it's a very interesting part of the anatomy that God has chosen for the covenant. And I was thinking about it, Grace and I were talking about it this week, 'cause we have a weird marriage, but we're talking about it, and it dawned on me as I was talking to Grace, here we are in Genesis 17, okay, for those of you that have been with us, what happened previously in Genesis 16? Adultery, Abraham got a woman that he was not supposed to be with and got her pregnant, adultery. We're in chapter 17, and if you come back, and I know you all won't and I understand, but if you come back next week, what do we hit in chapters 18 and 19? Sodom and Gomorrah. The covenant of circumcision for males is between adultery and sodomy. It seems like God is pulling his son aside, and he's saying, son, you're about to have a son. I'm your Father, you're about to be a father. And son, I have a lot of plans for your family. I have a lot of blessing for your family. I don't want you to be thinking about just a good time son, I want you to be thinking about a good legacy. And son, everything I want to do for you could be completely undone if you don't control one thing. So every day you're gonna be reminded, all of you belongs to me, and one thing in particular has to be devoted to me. True or false, I won't let the women get in trouble here, but true or false, many men, most men, all men, breathing men, this is the thing that could get them in the most trouble?

- [Congregant] Amen.

- Okay, one honest man. Okay, the Bible talks about two or three witnesses, we don't have that, we just have one. But earlier in Genesis we learned that we're supposed to have dominion. The first thing you need dominion over is you, your desires, your sexuality, your pleasure. It's the one thing that could undo everything. We live in a world where no one has dominion. Let me say this, before you can control anyone, just control yourself, before you tell everybody else what to do, just do what you're supposed to do. And we live in a day when people aren't consecrated to the Lord, and one part of men in particular is not consecrated to the Lord, and again, it's between adultery and sodomy. So we're gonna talk about this more next week. We're gonna get into sexual sin and deviancy and what it's even manifesting itself in, in our culture, I might talk about Disney and get kicked off social media and it's gonna be awesome, so just come back 'cause you can't watch online, but nonetheless that's where we're gonna be. But the point is this, for you men who have, and I don't wanna just speak to the men in particular, I know men and women are both capable of these kinds of things, but for the men in particular, if you've committed sexual sin, the good news is Abraham did and God was still gracious to him and worked with him and it was complicated, but God didn't abandon him, so there's hope and there's grace for you, but the warning for men who have been faithful to their wife and/or are single and looking forward to being married is, you could wreck everything in your family for generations if you don't control your sexual desires. Just let that sit. And it's not a condemnation, it's a warning. 'Cause we live in a stupid day when people are thinking about a good time and not a good legacy. And it's like, well, I like it, I enjoy it, and it's like, yeah, but what is the price for the next 4,000 years? 'Cause to this day there is still a painful price to be paid 4,000 years later for Abraham's adultery. And it doesn't mean God didn't love him, it doesn't mean he wasn't forgiven, it just means a lot of other people had to pay a steep price. So then the question becomes, and I know some of you are probably thinking this, you're like, okay, so do we need to get circumcised? This is always, as soon as you hit this issue, all the Gentile men are like, okay, so this was a big issue, so for thousands of years, the Jewish people circumcised their son on eighth day, Jesus comes as a descendant of Abraham through Isaac, he's circumcised on the eighth day, he dies for a sin, he rises, Christianity spreads, initially Christianity was largely Jewish, mainly Jewish. And then the Gentiles got saved and they showed up at church, they're like, hey, we found this book you guys wrote, good job. Nice, hey, and Jesus was Jewish, thanks a bunch, we like that guy, we're in. And immediately the Jews were like, hey, all your men need to be circumcised, Gentiles was like, whoa, we didn't read that. Otherwise we may not have showed up. If it's going to hell or you getting circumcised, I could flip a coin, I could go either way, I don't know. So then the Jews said, no, no, no, you gotta get circumcised, and the Gentile said, no, we had a meeting, the men voted, first time men have 100% agreed on anything in the history of the church, we all agree, we're good, we're fine. So then it became this contentious debate in the early church, and I was just thinking about it practically, who's keeping score on this? Like what the, you know what I'm saying? Like that had to be, are you, I mean, it had to be so, who keeps the list? Hey, join the team weekend, we're looking for some volunteers, you're like, oh, I'm a greeter, I'm a greeter, I'm a greeter, that's what I'm doing. So there's this big

debate between the Jews and the Gentiles, it appears in a lot of your New Testament books, and it culminates in one particular book of the New Testament called Galatians, and it culminates in Galatians 5. And the big debate is do the Gentiles need to be circumcised? And the answer is no. If you wanna read a commentary on this, read Romans 4, for you who are my nerd friends, read Romans 4, Galatians 5, you'll kinda get the New Testament summary on circumcision. And so what happens is a sign points to greater reality, once you've arrived at that destination, you no longer need the sign. So lemme say this, let's say you wanna drive to California right now, and you're on the outskirts of California and the sign says 120 miles to California, you drive by it, it points you in the right direction, when you get to California, do you need the sign? No, the sign did its job, it pointed me in the direction and now that I'm there, I no longer need the sign. Circumcision was a sign pointing to a greater reality. And Paul says it this way in Romans 2:29, he says, "Circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit." And so the point of the circumcision of the body was to point to the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. And that it wouldn't be through cutting and shedding of blood in our body, but through cutting and shedding of blood on his body, that we would enter into the new covenant. And as a result, the circumcision that he has for us is not external, it is internal, it is not in the body, it is in the heart. And the point is this friends, that man looks at the outward, but God looks at the heart the Bible says, and what can happen in life is as you and I sin, we get calloused, have you ever had callouses? What callouses cause is you to become unfeeling, you lose sensitivity, because of our sin, we get calloused, we get insensitive, it doesn't bother us, and it used to really bother me, now, it doesn't bother me anymore, calloused, and the Holy Spirit comes and circumcises, so that now we're tender and we feel, and we're sensitive toward the things of the Lord. In addition, throughout life, as people sin against you and they fail you and they disappoint you and they abandon you and they betray you and they use you, you can get very calloused. I don't wanna trust people anymore, they just hurt me. I don't wanna love people anymore, they disappoint me. I don't want to devote myself to people anymore, they abandon me, and our heart gets calloused. Let's talk about the heart here, let's talk about your inner life, your Spirit and your emotions and your soul. And so ultimately the problem is if you have a little callous on your heart, you want to be calloused, because you don't want to hurt, but the problem is you don't feel, and if you don't feel you can't love. And if your heart is calloused, it's not just calloused toward them, it's also calloused toward him. Like if my heart is calloused, because the people that I feel have wronged me or sin that I've committed, well, now my heart is calloused toward the Lord, and now my heart is calloused toward my wife, now my heart is calloused toward my kids, and now my heart is calloused toward this flock. And that's not good. Now it may keep me from pain, but it will keep me from love. And so the Holy Spirit comes along and he circumcises. He takes out the old heart, he gives the new heart, new desires, new sensitivity, new compassion, new empathy, new love, new devotion. And so what it's talking about here is that ultimately the greater reality of circumcision is circumcision of the heart through the Holy Spirit. And so what I wanna talk about here, let me just sort of bring what is sort of a odd technical chapter into a very practical application. Abraham is about ready to enter into a new season of his life. He's about ready to see the son that was promised to him 25 years earlier, being born through his wife to unleash and unlock God's destiny for their family and future. And it's like, God is a father who pulls Abraham aside, this is like before a wedding day, a father

grabs his son and says, all right, son, let me have a few final words with you. This is like a son who's getting ready to have their child born, and dad's in the hospital with the son, and pulls the son aside, and he is like, I love you, son, let me talk to you a little bit, let me give you a little pep talk, few coaching points, you're about ready to go into a new season son, and I'm your dad and I'm here and I love you, and I'm here to help, but I have a few things I wanna share with you, that's what God is doing here. Need to see God as a Father, need to see Abraham as a son, and now he's gonna be a father, but he's always gonna be a son, gonna be a son of God. And God gives him here three priorities, covenant walk with God, covenant marriage with wife, covenant parenting of children. The three relationships that are emphasized in Genesis 17 is relationship with God, his wife Sarah, and the coming of his son, Isaac, as well as Ishmael. And you just need to know friends, that these are your first, if you're a Christian, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, these are the same top first three priorities for all of God's people universally. Anything you want to add to this list comes after these priorities. Say, well, where's my job? Four, five, six, seven. Well, what about extended family? Four, five, six, seven. What about my hobbies? Four, five, six, seven. Everything else comes after these three. So the first is, and I'll deal with them in succession, covenant walk with God. So what Abraham hears from God is, first things first son, we're in a covenant, you need to walk with me, covenant relationship with God. Let me say this friends, the most important relationship you have is with God, you need to know that God is a person, and he wants to hear from you, we call that prayer and worship, he wants to speak to you, primarily through his Word, but here he's telling Abraham, son, if you wanna walk with me, here's the map. Step one, step two, step three, step four, this is where we're going. Let me say this, if you don't have time for your relationship with God, God won't bless anything else you do.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- Because if you're too busy living your life to have God in and over your life, you are not living the life that God has destined you for. And here's the big idea, we don't tell God how he can join us in our life, we ask God what he wants for our life. And so this is where starting your day, starting your week, starting your year, it's seeking the will of God so you can walk in the way of God. Now, once you have a relationship with God, that teaches you, trains you, and prepares you for all your other relationships. I can't have a covenant marriage with Grace if I don't have a covenant relationship with God. He loves me so I can love her and the kids, he forgives me so I can forgive her and the kids, he pursues me and teaches me how to pursue her and the kids. The first thing to being a healthy person and changing your life and legacy is walking with God. So my question to you friend, would be how's it going? And what we're seeing in our day is really concerning, the last two years with COVID, and politics, and social unrest, and lots of craziness, church attendance in America is about 50% today what it two years ago. That means that half of the people who were going to church, stopped and didn't come back. Now, maybe some are online or some have a good reason, but let me just say, when half of the people who were seemingly walking with God are no longer seemingly walking with God, true or false, that's a crisis? And how many of you in this world feel like giving up on God and going it alone is a better idea? How are you supposed to deal with your fear, your anxiety, your loneliness if you

don't have God to unburden you? As a result, pastors are discouraged, so pray for all churches, any church that loves Jesus, we love them, 'cause we're all on one team, it's team Jesus, I love pastors. George Barna is a researcher here in the valley, he came out with a survey said that 38% of pastors are looking to quit ministry never to return, Wall Street Journal put that number at 50%. So what you have is dying churches and discouraged pastors. Let me say, as things get darker, people need to walk with God more diligently. I mean, you need more time with God, not less. You need more Bible teaching, you need more prayer, you need more worship than you did two years ago. And as you look into the future, it doesn't look like we're heading into a great future. It looks like there's a lot of darkness and peril. So your walk with God is your first priority. Your next priority is your spouse, and let me say this, God shows up and he talks to him about Sarah, your wife, Sarah, you guys need a walking covenant, I'm gonna give you a kid, but your covenant marriage is gonna set you up to be covenant parents and what many couples do, and I've said this before, but I'll repeat it, 'cause many of you are new, what a lot of people will do, they will take their marriage and their kids and they'll put them together into something called family, don't do that. Your marriage and your kids are two different things. Now they are connected, but you were married before you have kids, and once they leave home, the hope is that you're still married. And what happens is a lot of people are like, well I'm all about God and family, no, you need to be about God, and marriage, and children. See Abraham had a relationship with God and he had a wife before God gave them a kid, so this is the order of priority. And what happens is, I've seen it at our age, Grace and I are, I'm 51, so is Grace, and what we are seeing is it looked like Christian families that were doing great until the kids grew up, and then things crater and implode, because what was holding the marriage together was not the covenant relationship with God and the covenant relationship with spouse, but the mom and the dad being so devoted to the care of the children. And what could happen is when you have little kids, you're just busy, and there's activities, and sports, and school, and church, and stuff, but then what happens is as the kids get older and they get more independent, they get a driver's license, they're not home all the time, they go off to college or get a job, they launch, which you want them to do. What happens then is oftentimes the couple craters, because they don't have a covenant marriage. They didn't build their intimacy and devotion and friendship. A couple of ways this plays itself out, sometimes a couple will just set up their life like parallel train tracks, two separate lives. You've got your life, I've got my life, you've got your friends, I've got my friends, you've got your money, I've got my money, sometimes you've got your house, I've got my house, I mean, literally it's just parallel lives, but they're not one. The other thing that happens is as the kids go to launch, the parents realize the only thing that kept us together were the kids, so then they're trying to keep the kids from launching, and they're trying to parent them like they're little. Oh, you don't go, don't move out, you need me, what can I do? And you're over parenting, you're smothering, you're controlling, because you don't have a good relationship with God and your spouse. I tell my kids this all the time, I love 'em with all my heart and they're launching, but mom and I are gonna be fine. 'Cause at the end of the day, I really like your mom, and you guys used to take all her time and now I get some, and I'm selfish, so I'm really excited about this. And when we first started dating, we were broke, now we can go on better dates, so every night is date night, I'm in, this is great. And I loved parenting the kids when they were little, I love the little years, but I love these years. The other thing that happens is if everything is

centered or built on the kids, then when the kids launch, you're gonna meddle in their affairs, you're gonna control them, you're going to get emotional, you're gonna get dramatic, you're gonna get overly involved and demanding, and one of two things are gonna happen with the kids as they're adults, they're either gonna have a codependent relationship with you, or they're trying to manage your dysfunction, or they draw a hard boundary to get distance from you, because you're not allowing them to differentiate, to leave their mother and father and start a new family. The other thing that happens is if you don't have a healthy relationship with God and your spouse, and your kids start to launch, you start pressuring them for grandkids. When are you guys gonna get pregnant? When do we get grand babies? Where's the grand babies? Where's the grand babies? You're like, hey, we're still on our honeymoon, hey, back off, and what it is, it's not that God is calling them to start their family, it's that you're demanding that they start their family, because your dysfunctional marriage only worked with little people and now they're big, so you need the big people to give you some little people. There's a lot of healing for people in their 20s right now, and a lot of bitterness from their parents. This is how, how many of you, now don't raise your hand, especially if you're here with your parents, but you've seen this, and so ultimately you want to have a covenant relationship with God, covenant relationship with spouse, to where you're healthy with the Lord, you're healthy with your spouse, you love your kids, but you let them grow up, you let them start their own families, you let them launch, you let them differentiate, you let them make decisions, and if you love them, and if you're healthy, and if you're available, and you set a good example, they're probably gonna invite you in to speak into their life without you shoving into their life, making demands. You don't have to kick the door down, they'll open it and say, hey, could you pray for us? Could we run something by you? First relationship is with the Lord, second relationship is with the spouse, and what it is here, it's singular headship and plural leadership, we looked earlier in Genesis 1 and 2, marriage is one man, one woman, in a covenant that is consummated, or some of you would say, that's not what the world says, well, the world knows nothing of God, the world knows thing of marriage, the world knows nothing of gender, the world knows nothing of sex, and the world knows nothing of family. It's the blind leading the blind, and that's the best case scenario. And so ultimately the principle here then is singular headship, plural leadership, and God is meeting with Abraham, 'cause he is the head of the household. Just like God held Adam accountable as head of household, and what he tells Abraham is you and Sarah are gonna lead this family, singular headship, plural leadership, here's what I'm telling you as a couple to do, but son, I'm starting with you, because you're the head of your family. And then third, it leads to covenant parenting of children. This is where our country is in the process of a swift self destruction. We have come to the conclusion that the two best things to raise a child are education and entertainment. Give 'em a screen and find 'em a school. And then let's just assume that those people know what they're doing. Do those people know what they're doing?

- [Congregation] No.

- No, they do not. The social media platforms are sermons, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, which is the bottom of the septic tank on the internet. They are constantly promoting and boosting messages that are contrary to everything that God would want to teach your children.

In addition, if you just send your kids to school and say, well, those people have degrees, I'm sure they know what's best for our kids, answer, if they don't know God, they don't know anything. Let me ask you this crazy question, what's the point of parenting? What's the goal of parenting? To raise children who walk with God in covenant relationship. If you're a Christian, that's your goal. My goal is walk with God in covenant relationship and then walk with my spouse in covenant relationship, and then have our kids walk with God in covenant relationship, rinse and repeat for generations.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- Amen. I mean, how many of you you're like, that's what I'm hoping for? Then why would you take people who don't walk with God and tell your children to follow them? If they're not walking with God, why would you want your children to follow them? If they're not in covenant with God, they don't understand anything about relationship. Now, the result is we have sought to replace mothers and fathers with governments. What God doesn't say is Abraham here's what I need you to do, vote for the right politician and send your to the right school. What he says is they're gonna need a good dad and a good mom, that's what God's saying. At the end of the day, we now have an elite that tend to hate God, tend to not have children, and tend to want to take your children and teach them how to walk away from God. And I know this is controversial, but it's true. And when we get into Sodom and Gomorrah, it's not gonna get any better next week. But at the end of the day, if you don't know what the goal of parenting is, how do you even parent? You walk in, show up at a basketball court, they're like okay, the team that scores the most points wins, okay, now I know what the game is. Show up at a pizza shop, they're like we make pizzas and people eat them, okay, that's what we're doing. They're a kid, what's the point? I don't know. Well until you know what the point of parenting the child is, how do you even know how to parent the child? The goal is raise children in a covenant marriage, covenant family, to walk with God in covenant relationship. Let me say this, the most important thing is not your child's self-esteem, it's their walk with God. It's not their grade point average, it's their walk with God. It's not their batting average, it's their walk with God. It's not their sports team, it's their walk with God. And ultimately a school can be a great help. My kids have been in some great Christian schools, I don't judge parents, you decide where your kids go, but at the end of the day, God is not going to call governments and school boards to give an account, he will call the parents. The parents are responsible in the sight of God for the raising of the child. And we're now seeing this as a head on collision culturally, and governments are saying, well, we know what's best for the child, the parents are like, sex education at five is not what's best for the child, but we're the government, right, and so you need to step back, because at the end of the day, God gives children to parents not to institutions. And so what's happening here, we can just look and say, what a crazy old text, you can say no, no, it's not just about what happened, but about what always happens. Because if Abraham and Sarah don't raise Isaac to walk in covenant relationship with God, he could end up in Sodom and Gomorrah. And next week, we're gonna look at a case study in a believing family, with Lot and his family, they let their kids grow up in Sodom and Gomorrah. They let them go to school in Sodom and Gomorrah. They let them be on social media with the Sodomites and the Gomorrahites. And at the end of the day,

it's gonna end really, really badly, so these are two case studies. Either you're going to encourage your kids to walk with God in covenant relationship, or they're gonna find themselves in Sodom and in a lot of sorrow. It's a really sobering case study. So let me close with just a couple of things. And I wanna say that, here God speaks to Abraham and is establishing him as a father. And I just want to speak blessing, and honor, and encouragement over the men in a world that does not do that ever. And at the end of the day, you have all been lied to with fake news and the promulgation of lies. And you're told, well, Christians and non-Christians they're the same, actually, Bradford Wilcox is the leading sociologist on faith, family, and freedom in the history of our country. He's a PhD from Princeton, he's a Professor at the University of Virginia in Sociology, he's a senior fellow at the Institute for Family Studies, he's the Director of the National Marriage Project. Here's what he says, Christian husbands are the best husbands, and Christian fathers are the best fathers. He did the largest data analysis in the history of our country, I've mentioned it before, but he released it in his data survey, Soft Patriarchs, New Men. Every year around father's day, all the media outlets have him come forth and give the update on faith, fatherhood, and family, Wall Street Journal usually highlights him, and what he says is this, men who go to church and walk with God, they read their Bible, they pray, they worship, lowest rates of divorce, lowest rates of adultery, lowest rates of domestic violence, lowest rates of out of wedlock birth, highest marital satisfaction rate, happiest wives, greatest sexual frequency, just as a little bonus round to encourage you, and also the most loving, attentive, involved fathers, most likely to help with homework, most likely to volunteer for the school field trip, most likely to coach the kids' sports team, most likely to take the little girl on the daddy date, most likely to be present to help raise their son. And you know what? Most of our cultural problems are really created by a lack of fatherhood. And I just, I always say, we need more fathers, less government, that's what we need. And it's just weird, 'cause you can go to College and you can learn about everything that's broken in the world, but you can't take a class on how to be a good man, you can go get a degree in women's studies, but there is no degree in men's studies. You can take classes on family systems and all they do is trash men, they don't train men. You need to know that my heart and my goal is for all of you, but first and foremost for the men. And I love you with all my heart, and I just want to encourage the men at this church. There are some great men at this church, you guys are defying gravity, and there's no such thing as a perfect father and a perfect husband, but at the end of the day, we've got some great men, women are being loved, children are being born, children are being adopted, men are getting their lives straightened out and making plans for their future. And for those of you who are young men, let me just put a father's hat on and just tell you, you should be very hopeful for your future. I've been married to the same girl for 30 years, I love her with all my heart, I am happily married, I really like her, I'm signing up for 30 more years and I hope she does the same. We've got five kids that are a little bit older, and I don't wanna put any pressure on my kids, but they're my heroes, and I love 'em with all my heart. I'm proud of every single one of 'em, I love and enjoy every single one of them. Every age of raising these kids has been a blessing. I liked it when they were little and I like it when they're big. And I'll just tell you this, I know that the world has lost its freaking mind, but we have the Word and it helps renew our mind. Father, thanks for a chance to study your Word, and God I pray for all of us that we would figure out our next step in our walk with you. That Lord God, that if we're gonna be married, that

we'd have a covenant marriage. God, if we're gonna have kids that they grow up in a covenant family. A lot of love, a lot of grace, a lot of mercy, a lot of patience, a lot of encouragement, a lot of blessing, a lot of hope, a lot of life. God, I pray for those marriages that are struggling, that even right now, there'd be a divine, supernatural healing in the Holy Spirit. God, for those parents that have the prodigals and the waywards, and this is their heart, but it's not yet reality, would you do a miracle? Would you show up in the life of their child, as you did Abraham? He started as a pagan, lost, completely apart from you, and then you found him, and God, would you do the same for their kids? And Lord God, I just pray for us, and our families, and our children, and our spouses, and God, I pray for all the little kids and kids ministry, I pray that they would walk in the footsteps of their parents following in the path of Christ, and God, I pray for generations of these dear people to have descendants who walk in covenant relationship with God, and God, I look forward to the day many, many years from now when in heaven, there is a great homecoming and there will be people with their last name that love and serve Jesus that came long after they did, but followed in the same path that leads to a party and a family reunion that never ends, in Jesus name, amen.