

## Why Should We Trust God's Promises to Us and Our Family?

- Well, howdy, welcome to the best night of the week. We're gonna be in a great book of the Bible called Genesis. So first and foremost, if you've got your Bible, go to Genesis chapter 15, and brand new study guide comes out this week. It covers Genesis 15 through 26. You can grab a copy on your way out, or it's free online at [realfaith.com](http://realfaith.com) under the store, and I just love helping people learn books of the Bible, so thanks for giving me that opportunity. And today we're gonna answer the question, why should we trust God's promises to us and to our family? Anytime you're entering into a significant relationship, you're like, "I wanna date them. I wanna to be engaged. I wanna get married. I wanna go into business. I wanna be friends with them. I wanna invite them to do life with us." Anytime you enter into a significant relationship, as a general rule, it's just wise to say, "I'm gonna get to know the people that know them the best." The people that are closest to them, are they finding them trustworthy and truthful and honest and integrous and dependable and faithful? And if not, why would I enter into a relationship with someone that's not good at doing relationship? Well, what's true of our human relationships is also true of our relationship with God, and Christianity is really about having a relationship with God. And for those of you who don't know God, or maybe you don't know God well, the question is, what's he like? Can you depend on him? Is he trustworthy? If you have your faith in him, is he faithful? If you trust in him, is he trustworthy? That's the big question. And to answer that, God presents a case study for us with a man named Abraham, and his relationship with God is really a prototype for all of our relationships with God, and when you create a prototype, it becomes the pattern and the precedent for everyone and everything that follows. And so from Genesis 11 through 25, it's a case study in how God has a relationship with Abraham, and as we see God's relationship with Abraham, it should encourage us to have a relationship with that God, 'cause he'll treat us the way he treats Abraham. So he's called the man of faith. He's the father of our faith. He appears more than 300 times in the Bible, and we're gonna learn about how Abraham's relationship really is the prototype for our relationship with God. So we're gonna jump right in to Genesis 15. Here's the big idea. You can have faith in God and questions for God. And so here we go, Genesis 15:1 through 7. "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision." He's positioned there as a prophet. The word of the Lord always comes to the prophet. "Came to Abraham in a vision." First words God says, "Fear not." We'll unpack all of this. "Abraham, I'm your shield Your reward shall be very great." But Abraham said..." So he's got questions. "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the he of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" God said, "You're gonna have a child." He's waited years. He's like, "I still have no child." And it's kind of funny. He's gonna tell God the org chart. "All I've got is Eliezer of Damascus." It's not like God's heaven going, "Thanks for the org chart. I had no idea how this family worked." And Abraham said, "Behold, you've given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And he's an elderly man at this point, still waiting for his first kid. "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir," speaking of Eliezer. "Your very own son shall be your heir." Your son is still coming. "And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them." So he goes outside, looks up, counts the stars, one, two, three, four, five. Obviously this is a big task. "Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And here's the big line. This is Genesis 15:6, one of the most important lines in the history of the world, and

that's not an overstatement. "He believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans," ancient Babylon, modern-day Iraq, "to give you this land to possess." So what do we learn about this God? Well, the first thing we learn is he's a Father who doesn't mind parenting his kids, and this is the first time that we see Abraham having any questions for God. Previously, when God speaks to him, he just obeys, and here he's got questions. How many of you are a parent, right? How many of you parents have realized your kids have got a lot of questions, amen? If you're single and you have kids, say, "What is it like?" It's like being a contestant on "Jeopardy." That's what it's like. Kids have got a lot of questions, and you and I, we are the children of God, if we believe in Jesus, and God is our Father, and just like our kids, his kids tend to have a lot of questions, and some people would look at Abraham's questions here for God, and they would say, "See, He's wavering in his faith," or, "He's growing in his faith." Once you know that there is a father or a mother who loves you, who cares for you, who is there for you, who is willing to walk with you and instruct you, you tend to open up and ask more questions of them, and some people will say, if you have faith in God, you shouldn't have questions for God. What I would say is, if you have faith in God, you bring your questions to God. If you have your questions, you may as well go to your Father, and so we see here that this God is like a Father and Abraham is his son. And Abraham's like, "Dad, I don't understand how this is gonna work. You told me I would have a son, that that son would lead to a nation, that nation would be Israel. Through Israel would come a blessing to the nations of the earth, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I've been waiting a very long time. I still got no kid. Are we still on plan A, or has something changed?" He's got a question. How many of you, if you were in your eighties and you were still waiting for your first kid, you'd have questions? You're like, "Do we both wear diapers? Like, I got a lot of questions." He's waiting to start his family, and these are reasonable questions. In addition, we see that this God rules and reveals the future, which is really good news. How many of us, we don't know what the future holds? And sometimes people are like, "I wish God would tell me the future." I don't. I don't want to know. I wanna go to bed tonight. I would just be freaked out. I'm glad God knows, and he doesn't all always tell me, but when I need to know, he'll tell me, and God here, he rules the future, and then he reveals it. The God of the Bible not only knows, but he controls what happens tomorrow, and he can reveal it to us as he wills. So when your Bible was written, 25% of it was prophetic, meaning it was predicting the future, God telling us what's gonna happen. Well, here he shows Abraham literally what's going to happen and he gives him a vision. And so a vision is when God shows you the future and you're awake. A dream is when God shows you the future and you're asleep. Well, here he's awake. And now, we live in a day of screens and technology, so we see things. In their day, they didn't have that, so a vision was a visual revelation about the future. And God gives him a vision, takes him outside, says, "Look up. Okay, see all those stars? That's how big my plan is, and you can trust me. You have a barren, elderly wife. You've waited years for your child, but trust me, this is what I'm working on." Now, in that, God can still speak through supernatural revelation. We believe that the Bible is the perfect Word of God, that everything is to be tested by the Word of God, but the Bible also tells us that God speaks through visions and angels and dreams, and sometimes God just speaks audibly, and he does so in creative and supernatural ways, and we still believe this. I've had all of this in my life. I've had prophetic dreams where God shows me what's gonna happen

and then it does, when I'm asleep. God's given me visions when I'm awake. This doesn't happen all the time, but this is this part of my relationship with God. And you need to know, if you're new, I've told the story, so I won't tell it in detail. This church was confirmed by a prophetic vision. And so I was in Florida and was in a pastor's conference, and I went to, I was looking for a coffee shop. I got turned around, and so, and I had a flight that was leaving within a few hours, so I thought, well, I'm gonna go to Mexican restaurant, 'cause when all else fails, go find nachos. I mean, that's just, you know, I would just tell you it's a general rule, like if whatever, you're like, "My day's not going the way I thought." Get some nachos, okay? So that's just... Where's the verse? I don't have one. I'm just telling you it's a good idea. I believe in Jesus and nachos. So I went to a Mexican restaurant, and I walked in, and the waitress was like, "Hey, would you sit over here?" I was like, "Yeah, that sounds great. Let me go wash up. I'll be right there." And there was a guy with his back to me, and he recognized my voice 'cause it's different, and so he turned around. He's a podcaster. I'd never met him. He's a pastor, runs a prayer ministry, and he said, "Pastor Mark?" I said, "Yeah." He is like, "Oh, what are you doing here?" I was like, "Well, I'm in town." He's like, "Well, I run a prayer ministry here in town," and he had a church, and I said, "Well, great." So I said, "Hey," and you know, said, "Hi," and went and washed up, came out, and he's like, "Hey, would you sit with us for a minute?" He was with a couple other pastors. I said, "Sure." So we're visiting. Super nice guy, and I said, "Well, I gotta go eat my nachos, you know? I mean, hey, man, guy's got priorities." So he said, "Well, would you mind if I prayed for you?" Answer? No, it's always a good idea to have nachos and prayer, always, and if you could put 'em together, that's a really, really good idea. So I was like, "Yeah, you can pray. I'll go eat the nachos." He prayed for me, and then he opened his eyes. He said, "It's so weird. When I prayed for you, I feel like God gave me a vision." I was like, "Okay, what was that?" He said, "You and your family were moving to a desert. I see cactus. I see desert. It's gonna be very dry, and you're going to move there as a family. You're gonna pack your bags." And he said, "The good news is, your whole family's gonna move there together. You're not gonna lose any of your kids in the move." And he said, "It's gonna be a physical place that is barren. It'll be a spiritual place that is blessed. It's gonna be an oasis in the desert, and God has a great season for you and your family, and God's gonna start a brand new ministry through you and your family." I was like, "Yeah, I was here for the nachos, but this is awesome, you know, so..." He said, "Does that make any sense?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "My flight leaves in a couple hours and I'm flying to Arizona, and Grace and the kids are gonna meet me there. They're also flying in from Arizona." I said, "And we're meeting with the pastors in the valley to see if they would welcome us to move there and to ask God if he has a ministry future for us in Arizona, 'cause that's where we feel called to be, but we don't have a job and we don't have any people, and we don't really know anybody, but we're asking the Lord, would you please confirm this, if this is your will?" I said, "So yeah, that's confirmation." He said, "Well, that's what I saw." And so ultimately God revealed what his will was for us, and he confirmed his future for us through a vision. God does this for Abraham, and the vision for Abraham is so big that it is going to extend far beyond his life. It actually extends into the present day. God not only rules and reveals the future. God also then is patient to get Abraham to trust in the future that he has for him, and the patience of Abraham and his struggle is this. God tells him he is gonna have a kid, and it doesn't happen for 25 years. How many of you in the middle, you'd be like, "Are we... Anytime is good, Lord." And the big

idea is this. Two things you've gotta get right for your life to go right, God's will, God's timing. How many of you, God's will is a little easier to accept than God's timing? True? Many of the mistakes I've made in my life, I knew God's will, so I'm like, "Well, let's get to it. Hey, let's go. Stuff to do, move, move, move. My favorite three things are results, results, results. Let's get to work," and I get ahead of the Lord's timing, and this happens often with God's people. And so what God is saying is, "My will is to give you a son, but my timing is 25 years." And what happens in the middle, sometimes people think, "Well, God, are you slow? Did you change your mind? Did you abandon me? Did you leave? And God is like, "No, I've not done anything wrong. I'm just working on you." 'Cause here's the big idea for Abraham. Before he can be a good father, he needs to learn how to be a good son, and this is true for all men, and it's true for women as well. Before you can learn to be a good parent, you gotta learn to be a good child. And so God is like, "Okay, son, I need to father you, and you need to understand how to parent and lead and love, and I'm gonna do that by parenting, leading, and loving you as my son, and then once you learn how to be a good son and you understand who I am as your Father, then you'll be ready to father your own son." And here's the big idea. Sometimes the 25 years that God has for you to wait for something, it's not punishment, but it's preparation. You may not be ready for the great future that he has for you. So he's not punishing you and making you wait. He's preparing you for that future. And let me say this, too. Oftentimes, we don't know what God's doing. So I was talking to somebody single recently and they're like, "I don't feel called to singleness." Well then you're not, you know? And they're like, "I feel called to be married, but I don't know where my spouse is, and I've been waiting, and I don't know where, I don't know what God's..." I said, "Well, we don't know what God's doing in their life." They may not be a Christian yet. Maybe God hasn't saved them. Maybe God is working out something in their life to prepare them for marriage. Maybe God is moving them here from somewhere else. We don't know what God's doing, that ultimately, we live by faith, not by sight, and we just trust that God's will and God's timing are both perfect, and if we don't feel like that is the case, then we need to trust that it is the case until we see that it is the case. So this God speaks, this God also serves, and this God tells him, "I am your shield." What that means is this God is safe, and what he says is, "I am your shield and your reward will be very great." And what he's telling him is, "You're gonna go through a lot, but it's gonna be worth it." And ultimately who needs a shield? Who needs a shield? Somebody who's being attacked. How many of you're like, "I didn't wanna hear that," right? The point is this. You're going to be attacked. If you are walking in the will of God, if you are seeking the way of God, you're going to get resistance from the enemies of God. You're going to. Now, we have physical enemies and we have spiritual demonic enemies, and what God is telling Abraham is not, "Your life is gonna be great, it's gonna go easy. You know, it's just gonna be simple." What he says is, "Actually you're gonna need a shield," and that means that attack is coming. You're going to be attacked. Your family is going to be attacked, but he says, "I will be your shield." And it takes faith to believe as you into an uncertain future that God will get between you and your enemies, and that's what he's promising. And now let me say this. The Christian life is one of tremendous opposition. If you're going to obey God and lead your family in the purposes of God, as Abraham is seeking to do, there will be a lot of opposition. But the good news is this. There is a shield. You just need to stay behind it. And this is where sometimes getting ahead of God's timing gets you ahead of the shield. The shield is moving at a

certain pace, and you're like, "That's too slow. I need to get out ahead." That's not a safer place to be. And so ultimately the question is, are you sticking close to the Lord? Are you spending time with the Lord? Are you making sure that the shield goes first? And he says, "If you do so, I will be your shield." Here's what I know. My family and I, we've endured a lot of attack in our life. God's a great shield. God's a great shield, and what he says is, "The reward will be great." So he takes him out and he shows him the stars of the sky, and he says, "The plan is, this many people are gonna belong to me, not just through your son, but through my Son, because through your son will come the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ." And ultimately, friends, you need to know you and I are part of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. God was looking all the way from his day to our day, and with this issue of seeing the stars, you need to know that he was speaking of you. You and I are part of the fulfillment of God's plan and promise and purpose through Abraham. Now, one of the things that's interesting as well. Paul says this in Galatians 3:7. He says, "It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." When Abraham went out, he looked at the same stars that you and I do, and God said, "I'm gonna save that many people." And you need to know this. When you look up at the stars tonight, there's a star with your name on it, that God was thinking of you, that God was planning for you, that God was preparing for you to be saved through the son of Abraham, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. So Abraham sees all of this. True or false, this is a bit much, this is a little overwhelming, and so what Abraham has, he has some anxiety and fear. And so then what we see is not only is this God one who is a Father and he rules and reveals the future, not only is this God patient as he walks with us. He speaks to us. He serves us. He also comforts us. And what he says to Abraham is this. "Fear not." You need to know that this is the number one command in the whole Bible. Depending upon which scholar you prefer, it appears roughly 150 to 300-plus times, and in different form or fashion, God will say, "Fear not," or, "Do not be afraid." Why does it say that so often? Because we're gripped by fear so often. It's a lesson that we're constantly learning. And in this, there are two ways to hear God speaking, "Fear not." One is a command. The other is an invitation. So ultimately, the difference between a command and the invitation is the heart of the person who's delivering it. So how many of you have had a kid, when they were little, sometimes they'd have bad dreams or night terrors and they're scared, and you could hear it? They're freaking out, they're screaming. You could walk in the room, and you could do one of two things. "Fear not!" Which, I'm just telling you, don't do that. Your kid's gonna have PTSD every bedtime. It's gonna be terrible for them. They're like, "That didn't help, dad," and you're like, "Okay." Or you walk in, "Hey, mom's here, dad's here. Hey, let me, let me... Hey, I'm right here, right here. Let me pray for you. Don't be afraid. I'm with you. You're okay." It's an invitation. Here, God reveals his Feather heart. Abraham is a grown man, but as he thinks of all of his responsibility in the future, he's got some fear and anxiety, and what fear and anxiety reveal to us is who or what we love. And fear comes when someone or something we love seems to have harm coming its way in the future. Someone or something we love, we gaze into the future, and we see harm coming in that direction, and it causes us fear or anxiety or worry or stress, because we love, and we don't want harm to come to that which we love. And Abraham, he loves his family. He can't wait to meet this kid. He's overwhelmed by all that God has for him. He's not sure how this is gonna work, and he's not sure that he's up for this responsibility. It's a big task. Now, this issue of fear is an incredibly important one, because we live in a day when

there is more fear than at any other time in the history of planet Earth. First of all, we have personal fears. Am I safe? What am I gonna do for a job? How is my health? Can I depend on my spouse? Are my kids gonna be okay? Is my wayward kid gonna come back? We've got all these personal fears, and then we've got localized fears. What's gonna happen with our economy? What's gonna happen to my kid's school? What's gonna happen to my job? What's gonna happen in our church? What? Oh, okay. Well, and then we got national, like where where's our country going? How much debt can you go into? I mean, what happens, you know, in the future without leadership? What what's going on? And then we've got global fear. Oh, there's a war there. There's a problem here. And here's the big idea. The amount of information on planet Earth is doubling every two years, which means that today you have twice as much to worry about as you did two years ago, and in two years, you'll have twice as much to worry about as you do today. And today, we have constant access to information. Our phones are fear triggers. That's what they are. Bad news, bad news, bad news, bad news, bad news, bad news, bad news. And you need to know that social media and the internet and clickbait, it runs on two emotions, fear and anger. It exists to get you to be afraid and angry, because then you engage, and if you engage, you will become enraged. You become emotionally unhealthy. And it used to be that we didn't have much information. You don't know what's going on around the world. You don't know, and so you know what you do? You live your life. But what happens once you know that there is potential harm for someone or something you love in the future, you have a series of involuntary response patterns that are hardwired into the body and brain that God has given you, and they're not bad, but you need to regulate them, or they will ruin you. And so what happens is, your body, when it senses fear, anxiety, or danger, your blood pressure goes up, your heart rate goes up, your cortisol levels go up, your adrenaline goes up. You're on, you're alert. You can't sleep. This is where your energy is just being drained, because you're in an anxious state, and the result is, ultimately, this affects your energy levels, which is why you crash around the afternoon, which is why we caffeinate and we do energy drinks, and then we can't sleep at night, so we do alcohol and sleeping pills, and it starts this breaking of the body through the stress in the mind. And this is exactly what's happening. We're seeing record mental health epidemic and crisis, and part of that is biological in the body. Some of it's also in the mind. So when you have someone or something you love, and you look into the future and you see potential harm coming that way, what your brain craves is more information, because what we need to know is everything that could potentially happen, so that then we could create scenarios where whatever happens, we can prevent it, so that the harm doesn't happen, so that we can save that which we love or that whom we love. Now, your mind just becomes obsessed with data and information, and again, we now have information constantly accessible, but the truth is, a lot of the information is not true. So now we're freaking out about things that may not even be truth, but falsity. And this is where we saw in the last few years with a global case study in fear. People are just digging up information, trying to predict the future, so that they can control it and change the outcome, and what we're trying to be is God. If I just know everything, then I can control everything, and then the outcome will be the one I desire. And at the end of the day, none of us really knows everything, and much of what we know is actually not true, and we're not in control, and we can't always prevent the future that we are not excited about. And the result then, too, is eventually when you see potential harm or danger in the future, you tend

to case build. You tend to grab information and fit it within a narrative, and once you reach a conclusion, all information goes into the narrative, and you case build. This leads to one of two things, self-fulfilling prophecy or false prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecy is you're so worried about that happening that you're gonna be the one who causes it to happen. I see this oftentimes, I'll give you two case studies. A single person, maybe they were dating previously or they were divorced, and they had a relationship that ended painfully and poorly, and their fear is, "I'm gonna get hurt again. It's gonna fall apart." So they get a little obsessed about it, so then they seek to control that person and control the outcome and control the future. And guess what happens? The person feels smothered and distrusted and controlled, so they walk away from the relationship, and the whole reason that you got freaked out and did the research and put in all the control mechanisms was that you wouldn't be alone, and the reason that you're alone is 'cause you did that. I see this oftentimes with parents. I'll give you one just simple observation. Fear reveals who or what you love the most. We love our kids, and if there's any potential for harm in their future, we want to do all we can to prevent it, which is absolutely reasonable. But the truth is, let's say you've been traumatized. Let's say you've been harmed. You've been through hardship, and your fear is, "Oh no, I'm not gonna let that happen to my kids. My kids are not gonna get hurt. My kids are not gonna suffer. They're not gonna go through what I go through." You become obsessed with their wellbeing. You become obsessed with information. You become obsessed with control, and guess what? You're the one who hurts your kid through your control, your legalism, your distrust, and your fear. You're like, "Well, I love you." "But you're hurting me." "Well, I'm hurting you 'cause I'm trying to protect you." "You're not protecting me. You're hurting me." We do this all the time. It becomes self-fulfilling prophecy or false prophecy. The Bible has a lot to say about false prophets, and none of it's good. A false prophet looks in the future and predicts something that never happens. The most powerful false prophet in your life is you. You look into the future like, "Oh my gosh. This is what's gonna happen." God's like, "I didn't say that. You did." That's a false prophecy. How many of you have looked into the future, become very anxious or afraid of something that never happened? Do you remember Y2K? Remember that? And what happens is when all of this happens in the mind and the body, it then affects the soul, and the Bible says that God has not given us, 2 Timothy 1:7, a spirit of fear. What happens when you choose fear and instead of faith, and let me say this. Fear comes, and that's not a sin. It's not a sin to have fear. It's a sin to keep fear, to live in fear, to embrace fear, and the Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear. Some of you are fearful, anxious people. You're fearful, and when you live in a spirit of fear, you cannot live in the Spirit of God. The spirit of fear is a counterfeit of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God leads us in faith. The spirit of fear is the counterfeit of the spirit of faith and the Spirit of God. And you could tell when people are gripped by a spirit of fear. For them, they start to lose touch with reality, and they're like, "Here's what's gonna happen. Oh my gosh, have you heard?" And these are the people that are constantly reposting on social media. They're living online. They're creating a false universe. They're living in a false narrative. They're wrongly interpreting data. They're triggering other people. They're posting, reposting, commenting. They're forwarding, they're sending it to you, and they want you to be freaked out, too, and it's like you're gripped by a spirit of fear. I have certain friends of mine that I love with all my heart. Every text they send me is sent by the spirit of fear. It's everything that they're freaked out or angry about or worried

about today, and when you're in a spirit of fear, it makes sense to you, but you're not in your right mind. And we had a global case study the last two years, in what it looks like for a planet to be governed by the spirit of fear. Just is. This dawned me this week, as I was praying for you guys. I'm sitting at a stoplight, I kid you not. I look over to my right. There's someone alone in their car, okay? Maybe you've seen them or their relatives. They are legion. And so what happens is, they are wearing gloves and a mask, and I kid you not, a shield alone with the windows up in their car. True or false, spirit of fear?

- [Man] True!

- I mean, if you're that scared, don't get in the car. I look over to the left. I kid you not, on a bike, there's a kid, 15, 16, 17. It's like 85, 90 degrees out. They're riding a bike with a mask and gloves on. No helmet. It's just, if you're in your teens, in the fresh, warm air of Arizona, riding a bike by yourself, your odds of dying of COVID are the same odds as me getting pregnant. Same odds, okay? But if you're riding a bike with no helmet, your odds of getting hurt, those are real odds.

- [Woman] Yes!

- But that's the spirit of fear, and ultimately, the spirit of fear is only cast out by the love of God. That's what the Bible says. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but perfect love casts out fear. Just like the Holy Spirit casts out a demon, so it's the love of God that casts out the spirit of fear. Now let me say this. Other people's fears seem silly to us, but our fears seem silly to them, and we've all got 'em. Some of you, your fear is around finances. It's around health. It's around relationship. It's around safety. It's around security. It's around control. We've all got our fears, and what happens when we are triggered by fear, the biological response pattern that God has hardwired in the brain and in the mind, it responds in a few ways. Fight, like you're gonna escalate and agitate, and you're gonna deal with it and conquer it. Flight. I'm scared. I'm gonna hide. I'm gonna retreat. I'm gonna withdraw. I'm gonna get to a safe place. Freeze. I don't know what to do, so I just kind of panic. Or faith, and that is, I'm going to find God in it, and he's gonna get me through it. And what happens when fear comes, we come to the conclusion, it's bigger than me. It's bigger than me. But then you gotta remind yourself, but he's bigger than it. And so what happens is, most of the time, I've looked up every occurrence in the Bible where God says, "Fear not," and every time that God says, "Fear not," usually in the same orbit, in some form or fashion, God says, "For I am with you." Here he just told Abraham, "I'm your shield." What he's saying is, "It's going to be hard, but I'm going to go first. You're not going to go alone. I go before you. I go with you." It's not the absence of trouble, but it's the presence of God that allows us to be emotionally healthy, and a lot of times, we think, if I could just get rid of all my fears and problems, and if I could be in control and if everyone and everything was the way I want it, then I'd be okay. It'll never be that way, and even if it was, you wouldn't be okay. It's not the absence of your troubles. It's the presence of your God that makes you emotionally healthy and well. And faith does not say God's gonna get me around it. Faith says God's gonna go before me through it. And let me just encourage you. This is something that only God's people can do. If you're a

non-Christian, you can do fight, you can do flight, you can do freeze, but only God's children can do faith. Now, is it a sin to be afraid? No. What happens is religious people will weaponize the concept of faith. You shouldn't get emotional. You should trust God. You shouldn't be freaked out. You should trust God. You shouldn't ask questions. You should trust God. The question is, well, how about Jesus? 'Cause what happens is, when you're triggered by fear, the counselors will tell you that your emotions become dysregulated, and what you need to do, then, you need to meet with God the Holy Spirit and invite him to regulate your emotions, bring you back to a normal state. So what happens here, Abraham's afraid, and he meets with God. The same thing is gonna happen for the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, and the descendant of Abraham. So let's look at Jesus as a case study. The night before he is betrayed, is Jesus anxious, stressed, having a hard night? Yeah. He's up all night. Can't look at Jesus and say, "Have faith, go to bed. Trust the Lord." He's like, "I am the Lord, so. I know how this works." He's up all night. His buddies sleep fine. He's not sleeping at all. The Bible says that he was sweating like drops of blood. Medical experts will call this hematidrosis. It's a medical condition that happens to those who are under unbelievable stress and anxiety. They start to seep blood out of their pores. This is the worst level of stress. Is he anxious? Is he stressed? Is his body responding? Well, yeah. And what does he do with it? "Cause he here's the big deal. Sometimes people are like, "You shouldn't be so emotional." Why not? Jesus was. Well, you shouldn't be crying about that. Jesus did. Well, you shouldn't be up all night worried about it. Well, Jesus was. Here's what I know. I'm not gonna be better than Jesus, and it's not a sin to be human. You're human. You're gonna have bad days. You're gonna get stressed and anxious. It's okay to not be okay. You just can't stay not okay, so you gotta meet with the Lord and work it out. God, I'm not doing okay. It's not like he's in heaven going, "What?" He knows. And so what Abraham does, he meets with God. What Jesus does, he meets with the Father, and Jesus has the same thing as Abraham. Abraham's got questions for God. How's this gonna work? Jesus has got questions, too. What he says is, "Father, okay, I know here's what we talked about. I'm gonna live without sin. I'm gonna go to the cross. I'm gonna die in the place of sinners, and you're gonna pour out your wrath on me." But what he says is, "If there's any way to take this cup of wrath from me, if I don't have to drink it full strength, if there's another option, can we talk about that?" And then in the end, he wrestles, but then he surrenders, and he says, "Your will be done." Here's what I'm telling you, friends. It's okay to be emotional. It's okay to be scared. It's okay to be worried. It's okay to be anxious. It's okay to have a sleepless night. It's okay to have questions for God, and it doesn't mean that you lack faith. It means that, if you have faith, you will bring your fears to your Father, and you're gonna work out that future with your Father, and then you're gonna walk in it by faith, because he goes before you as your great shield. I get so frustrated with religious people, and if you're religious, I love you 'cause I have to, but you're so frustrating. And they quote verses to avoid emotions. We don't quote verses to avoid emotions. We quote verses to connect with the heart of God, okay? If anybody's ever told you, "You should just trust the Lord. You should just obey. You should just stop crying. You shouldn't be so emotional. You shouldn't think like that. You shouldn't feel like that." I would say, be honest about where you are, invite God in, and then he'll change where you are. That's what Abraham does. That's what Jesus does. And here's the good news about this God. He has grace for you. That's what Abraham's gonna experience, and he's gonna quote... So Romans here is the Apostle Paul looking back

and commenting on Genesis 15, which we are studying, and he quotes Genesis 15:6. "Abraham believed the Lord, and it was credited him as righteousness." Paul also quotes this in Galatians, and Jesus' brother James quotes it in his letter bearing his name. All this is in the study guide, but here's his commentary on Genesis 15 in Romans 4. "What shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?" He's speaking to those who are biological Jews. We are spiritual descendants. They were physical. "For if Abraham was justified, justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?" Quotes Genesis 15:6 that we just looked at. Abraham, what? "Believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due, and to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." What he's talking about here is Abraham is our prototype of faith, and the question is, is his faith in a God who is faithful? Is his trust in a God who is trustworthy? And faith here is trust. It's confidence. It's certainty. It's commitment. Faith is two things. It's an internal conviction that leads to an external action. It's what you believe, and that determines how you behave. And he says that Abraham believed the Lord. He had faith in the Lord. And ultimately, true faith in the Lord is no plan B. I'll tell you this, Grace and I, this August, we'll celebrate 30 years of marriage, and on our wedding day, I didn't bring another girl in case the first one didn't work out. Otherwise she would've stabbed me in the liver, okay? So, but the point is, it's like, "Honey, I love you. I trust you, and just in case, I've got a plan B." No, I have a plan A. That's my only plan. That's what faith and trust is. I'm gonna trust the Lord, and that's all I got. I'm gonna walk with the Lord, and that's all I need. And what he's talking about here is righteousness, and righteousness is a legal standing where you're declared righteous in the sight of God. Sometimes people use language of, "I need to be right with God," or, "I need to get right with God." Well, God makes you right with himself, and being justified is the process by which God declares the unrighteous person righteous. There are two ways that people pursue righteousness, and righteousness is simply this. It's either pursued by what he calls works or faith. It's achieved by your performance, or it is received by God's grace as a gift, and this explains all of human history. And by works, what he's talking about here is God is good. We are bad. Something needs to be done to make things right between us and God, so that we can be righteous in relationship with God. The question is, well, do we do the work or does God do the work? See, the work needs to get done, but who does the work? If God does the work, that's grace or gift. If we do the work, then that is performance and earning. That's what he's saying. The way that people pursue righteousness, and you need to know this. We were made in the image and likeness of God, we looked at in Genesis 1. As a result, we want to be righteous. There's something in us that craves that, and so what we do, then, we try to make ourselves good people. This happens in two ways. There's really religious works righteousness and secular works righteousness. Religious works righteousness is where people will seek to create almost a merit-demerit system in the church, and then they'll judge you, and you get points if you do good and you lose points if you do bad. All other religions except for Christianity are works-based. So let's say you believe in karma, then there's a cosmic debt. You die, you reincarnate. You've gotta suffer to pay it off and to pay it back. You gotta work for it. In Islam, your good deeds need outweigh your bad deeds. It's like scales, and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, then maybe you'll make it in the end. The way this works within

Christianity, and it's unfortunate, because it's truly not Christian, is what I would call legalism, and this is where people will put themselves in the judgment seat of God. They will add the God's law. They will make rules that God never made, and they'll judge you by things that God doesn't judge you by. So this says, okay, well, do you speak in tongues? What Bible translation do you use? What kind of church do you go to? Do you sprinkle people when you baptize 'em, or do you dunk 'em, like the Bible says? Do you send your kids to public, private, or homeschool? A lot of points there. A lot of points there. When your church gets together for worship, do you use instruments or not use instruments? What songs do you sing? Do you sing the Psalms, do you sing the hymns, or do you sing those secular pagan Satanic rock songs? What do you do? Three demerits for that. And what happens then is you create a culture of judgment and you create a culture of performance, and it leads to two kinds of people, arrogant people and broken people. The arrogant people are like, "We're winning. Our score is so high for doing so good." Oh, no, you're proud, and pride is the worst sin of all. It's what got Satan kicked out of heaven, so actually, you're not at the front of the line. You're at the back of the line, right? That's where Jesus looks at the most religious people in his day, and he says, "You cross earth and sea to make one convert, and they're twice the son of hell that you are." They're like, "No, we're the good guys." He's like, "I'm the good guy, and you're gonna kill me. You're not the good guys." The religious people murdered Jesus, 'cause he did it wrong. That's what religious people do. They assault and murder people who don't do it their way, 'cause they think it's God's way, and there's even whole books, how to do things God's way. I've read them. That's not true. This is the book that tells us how to do things God's way. The other way that people pursue righteousness, making sure that we know that they are a good person is not in a religious sense, but in a secular sense. Let me explain this. This will make sense of America. Social justice, political alliance, causes are now held with religious zeal and devotion, and we're out sort of showing everyone, "This is my team." And so wokeism is workism. That's what it is. It's secular view of works. Who did you vote for? Merit, demerit. Do you believe in traditional or nontraditional marriage? Merit, demerit. Do you believe in all religions or just your religion? Merit, demerit. Do you recycle or not? Merit, demerit. Will you put the rainbow flag on your social media platform and the right hashtags and causes, or not? Merit, demerit. And it's a public way of keeping score. We're the good people, they're the bad people. That's why our nation now is polarized and divided. Two groups of people saying, "We're the good people." "No, we're the good people." "We're the good people." "No, you're the bad people." "You're the bad people." God shows up, he's like, "You're all the bad people, and Jesus Christ alone is good." And he doesn't reward us for our performance. He judges us for our performance, because we've sinned and failed, and then he's the one who performs. And so here's the good news. It says that Abraham believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Do you know who that Lord is? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not about what we do. It's about what he does. It's not about our performance, but about his performance. It's not about our good, it's about his good. And so at the end of the day, your relationship with God is not based upon what you do, but trusting what Jesus does. And so at the end of the day, all of this leads to Jesus Christ comes to the earth. He doesn't just live a good life. He lives a perfect life, and then he goes to the cross, and he suffers and he dies in our place for our sins. He's the blessing to the nations that was promised through Abraham, not just Abraham's son, but the Son of God that comes

through Abraham, and on the cross, as Jesus is suffering and dying, what does he say? It is? It's finished. All the work's done. There's nothing for you and I to do, but to trust what he's already done. That's what faith is. And 2 Corinthians 5:21 is one of my favorite scriptures that says that, "God made him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God." Everybody's like, "I wanna be a good person." You know what? God loves you too much to let you be a good person. He wants you to be a new person. God doesn't make people better. He makes people new. It's not just an improved version of who you are. It's a completely new version of who you will be when he is done with you. And so ultimately, when Jesus dies, he takes your place and he puts you in his place. He takes the unrighteousness to give you the righteousness. He takes the separation to give you the reconciliation. He takes the death to give you the life. He takes the wrath of God, so that you can receive the grace of God. And the question is, well, what do I do? Trust the one who's done everything. His name is Jesus Christ. And this is what it means when it says that Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. So I would just ask you this. Do you know Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you belong to Jesus? And for those of you who are religious, you probably don't really understand Jesus. I was talking to somebody recently, and their mom is a hundred years old. Physically not doing that great. Asked their mom, "Mom, you know, you're getting, you know... At some point, you're gonna see Jesus. We're there. What are you thinking?" She said, "I hope I make it." "Hope you make it?" "Yeah, I mean, I believe in Jesus, but man, I hope when I stand before him, I hope I pass the test." No, the test was already taken at the cross of Jesus Christ, and if you believe in him, you have absolute confidence that what Jesus has done is absolutely perfect and secure. And now, because the big idea is this. You either live for your righteousness or you live from his righteousness. I don't live for my righteousness. I live from his righteousness, and then he's gonna conclude with this section of how we enter into this covenant relationship with our God. Genesis 15:8 through 21. But he said, "O Lord God." He's got questions. Is it okay to have questions for God? Yes, just not accusations. Hey God, I don't understand. Can we talk about this? He's like, "Well, you're my kid. I'll chat with you about it." "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, God said, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." In the book of Leviticus, where there are sacrifices, these will be animals that are included in the temple worship. "And he brought all these, cut them in half," so there's a sacrifice, shedding of blood, "laid each in half over against the other, but he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abraham drove them away." These belong to the Lord, not to you. "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abraham." Just like when God created Eve, Adam was asleep. Here God's gonna enter into covenant with Abraham while Abraham is asleep. "And behold, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him." It's the middle of the night. "Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Know for," what? "Certain." "Know for certain," that's what faith is. Faith says if God says it, it's a reality. "That your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there and will be afflicted for 400 years." This is fulfilled in the next book of the Bible, the Exodus, where the descendants of Abraham go down into Egypt. There they are for 400 years. Then they are enslaved by the Pharaoh. Then God delivers them with great plunder. God knows the future. You need to know the God who knows the future. "But I will bring judgment on

the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possession." They plundered the Egyptians. "But as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age." You're gonna to be a ripe old age. You're gonna get your son. "They shall come back here in the fourth generation for the inequity of the Amorites is not yet complete." God is patiently awaiting a people group to reach the fullness of their evil, as he did in the 120 years in the days of Noah, then judgment. "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between those pieces." This is representative of the presence of God. "On that day the Lord made," what? A covenant. That's the word, friend. That's one-way grace. That's unique relationship. "With Abraham, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." That's the same geographical position as the Garden of Eden. We would now call it Israel. Now, what he's saying here is this. God makes promises. You need to know that this is incredible, because in that day, they had kings. Kings don't make promises, 'cause they don't have to, 'cause you don't vote for them, right? If your dad's the king and then you inherit the kingdom, you're the king until you give the kingdom to your son. Nobody's voting for you. So the king doesn't need to make promises. "Hey, vote for me..." "We're not voting." Politicians make promises, not kings, because we vote for them, and they lie to us. That's how it works. How many of you, you've had a politician's like, "Vote for me and I'll do this." You're like, "That's what the last seven guys said, and they didn't do what they said they would do." Here's what's amazing. A politician has to make promises so that you'll vote for them. A king does not, but God is a King over a kingdom. He makes promises, because our King is also our Father. And ultimately, in that day, it would be the people who would make promises to the king, but because our King is our Father, he's the one who makes promises to us, and he promises a covenant relationship. This is one-way grace. This is unique relationship, and this is entered into while Abraham is what? He's asleep. It's not like, "Hey Abraham, what'd you do to get saved?" He's like, "I don't know. I was asleep." He did not save himself. He did not enter into this relationship. This is like a parent adopting a child. The parent is the one who makes it happen. This is the Father adopting Abraham. That's what a covenant is, and ultimately, God does this while he is asleep because it's all God's work, and God has a sacrifice, and what would happen in an ancient covenant, if there were two parties in the covenant, they would pass through the sacrifice, showing that this is life and death solemnity, meaning if either of us violate the terms of the covenant, you can kill me. If I violate it, you can kill me. If you violate it, I can kill you. So this is a death pledge to be good for your word. Now, what happens here, did two people pass through the sacrifice, or just one? Just one. It is the Lord, and it's the Lord saying, "I will promise that we will always have a relationship and it doesn't matter what you do. I will preserve that relationship." And ultimately this leads to the shedding of blood, and the Bible is a bloody book. I mean, I looked it up. About 392 times in the Old Testament speaks about blood, around 100 times and the New Testament speaks of blood, and then there's lots of other intimations, and the point is, what's the whole point of blood in the book? Well, the point is that the wage for sin is death, and that blood needs to be shed for the forgiveness of sins, and either we die for our sins or a substitute dies in our place for our sins. And here, these animals are substitutes, and they ultimately are a foreshadowing of the

forthcoming of Jesus Christ. Everything in the Bible is pointing to Jesus. It is heading to Jesus. It is revealing Jesus. It is unveiling Jesus. It is anticipating Jesus. And then Jesus comes. Ultimately, Abraham does get a son. That son does become a nation. That nation does go to Egypt. That nation, 400 years later, does escape Egypt. That nation does bring forth Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He lives without any sin, and then the night before he is betrayed, he sits down at the Passover, which we now call the Lord's Table, and in Luke 22:19 and 20, it says that, "Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and he gave it to them, saying, "This is my... This is my body." The Lord is going to make the sacrifice. "Which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." This is why Christians partake of communion to this day. "And likewise, the cup, after they had eaten, saying, quote, "This cup is poured out for you. It is the new covenant in my blood." Ultimately, the way that Abraham had a relationship with God is the way that we have a relationship with God. God made promises to him as God makes promises to us. He trusted God as we trust God. His righteousness was a gift from the Lord as our righteousness is a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ, and that ultimately, his relationship with God was secured by God, and it was made possible through a substitute dying, shedding blood so that his sins could be forgiven. All of that happens in the new covenant with Jesus Christ. I'll summarize some of this for you. God told Abraham to leave his father and his home as a picture of Jesus, the Son of God, leaving God the Father in his home in heaven. God promised Abraham a son, who would lead to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God promised Abraham his descendants would bless the nations, and Jesus Christ is that blessing, amen? God promised Abraham numerous spiritual descendants, and he was speaking about us, if we believe in Jesus. God chose animals to shed their blood and give their life in the Abrahamic covenant. God chose Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to shed his blood and give his life for the new covenant, and Abraham waited in faith for the first coming of Jesus. We wait in faith for the second and last coming of Jesus. Let me summarize this. When it comes to your relationship with God, Paul talks about this. I'll just summarize it in Galatians and Romans, that most people have two views of God, Master or Father. That's it. Master, I need to work. I need to earn. I need to produce. I need to perform. If I have a good day, he loves me more. If I have a bad day, he loves me less. If I have a really bad day, he doesn't love me anymore. My relationship with him is predicated upon my performance, which means every day is an anxious and nervous day. The other view of God is God is Father, and to enter into a covenant relationship with God is like a child being adopted by a parent. And what happens is, so many of us, even those who are raised in the church, we tend to think of God as Master. We see here that his relationship with Abraham is God as Father. He's parenting him through the whole thing. And so I wanted to try and get to the heart of what it means to have a covenant relationship with God, 'cause Jesus talks about the letter and then the spirit, the spirit is the heart of the thing. What's the heart of a covenant relationship with God? And I was trying to figure out how to get the heart, 'cause I'll tell you this. As a dad, a father adopting a child makes a lot of sense to me. When my kids were born, I loved 'em. You're like, "What did they do?" Nothing. I just love 'em. Well, what would they need to do for you to disown them? That's impossible. Actually, if they have a bad day, I'm gonna put more of my love and affection on them to help. I'm not gonna disown them. This is my kid. I love my kid, and they're my kid, whether they're a good kid or a bad kid. God is not your Master. He's your Father, and the Bible talks about our walk with God, so that Adam walked with

God, Noah walked with God, Enoch walked with God, Abraham walked with God, and when you think of your walk with God, what oftentimes happens is, if you have a view of God as Master, you think he's the judge at the finish line of your life. Like you gotta get up every day and you gotta run hard, you gotta stay in your lane, you gotta play by the rules, and if you make it to the finish line, if you make it, he'll judge you, but he may even disqualify you, 'cause you didn't do it right. God is not the Master at the finish line. God is the Father at the starting line, okay? I wanted to share this as an illustration with you. This is Dick and Rick Hoyt. Dick Hoyt had three sons. Two were healthy and one was born a quadriplegic. That's his son, Rick. The doctor said, "He's gonna be in a vegetative state. You need to put him in a care facility. Spend your time raising your two sons. This son is not worth your time and energy. He is not going to amount to anything, and you need to basically pretend that you only have two sons, and you need to ignore the third." And he said, "No, that is my son, and I love all my sons, and I love him the same, and I'm gonna raise him the same." So Dick Hoyt raised his three boys, and there was one day that Rick saw that there was a fundraising race, and he never took a step in his life, and he never spoke a word. Through technology and a computer, he had the ability to communicate, so he communicated to his father. He said, "Dad, I wanna run in that race." And his dad said, "Then... Then I will push you." So they signed up for the race, and then Rick says, quote, "My dad is my hands and feet." Before it was done, this father-son team ran 1,100 races. They ran marathons. They ran triathlons. Here's the big idea. The son never took a step, but he always made it to the finish line because he had a fantastic father. Let me show you what this looks like, and let me tell you, if you look at the picture, I want you to see that you are Rick, and God the Father is a good Dad. The days that you're strong, he'll run with you, the days that you're weak, he'll walk beside you, and the days that you are done, he will carry you. Question is how do I get to the finish line if I can't take a step? God is a good Father, amen? God is a good Father. That's what it means to have a covenant relationship with God. Father, thank you for an opportunity to call you Father. Thank you that Jesus Christ is the perfect Son of God. Jesus, thank you for sending the Spirit to give us your righteousness as a gift, to make us right with you. And Father, I just thank you that you don't love us less on our bad day, you don't love us more on our good day, 'cause you can't love us any more, and you won't love us any less. And God, as we see that Abraham is asleep and you're the one who makes the relationship possible, we just say thank you. Thank you for all that you're doing when we're not even aware. And God, we come to worship you now, not because we want you to love us, but because you already do, not so that you'll accept us, but in Christ you already have, not so that you would be pleased with us, but because we are in Christ, you're pleased with him, therefore you're pleased with us. God, I pray for us as a people that we would not see you as Master and work for our righteousness, that we'd see you as Father and work from our righteousness. And God, I thank you that you are not a judge at the finish line of our life, but you're a Father at the starting line of our life, and you walk with us every step, and I thank you that our walk with God is not a walk for God. It's a walk with God, and sometimes it really truly means that we're being carried by our Father. And so, Lord, I pray now that the Holy Spirit would come and encourage us as we meet with you. As Abraham met with you, as Jesus met with you, we need to meet with you, and I pray that this would be that time. In Jesus' good name. Amen.