

Genesis

Chapter 17 - God's Commitment to More Forever and Exceedingly (vs. 1-8)

Genesis 17:1-8: Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty;
Walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly.” Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram,
But your name shall be Abraham;
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after

you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

Well, we come to Chapter 17, and we're now 24 to 25 years after Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Wow, that's a long time. Where is Abram? Well, still waiting. The promise was clear, “I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you a blessing. You're going to be great. All the nations of the earth are going to be blessed because of you.” Okay, when's that going to happen? Things begin to happen like famine, maybe fears begin to surface. He began to walk in a way that you have concerns about how things are going to happen, and that begins to hover over you. And before long, all of those things cause you to actually think through perhaps other scenarios. And it is in that, that sometimes you've begin to take matters in your own hands. “God wants me to be a blessing. I'm going to be a blessing. I'll figure out how to do that.” And I think if there's anything that we learn from

Abram, it is that in order for us to be a blessing, God has to be in the work. Paul will so aptly put it to the Corinthians, "No man can build a foundation other than the one that is laid that is in Christ Jesus." In other words, you can't do this yourself. And in Acts 1, when Jesus is going up into the heavens, He says, "Now, what I need you to do is wait. Because the Spirit of God is going to come upon you, but don't start. Wait until the Spirit of God comes upon you." And I think oftentimes we begin to think that, "Okay, it's our job to save the world," and then we start doing it ourselves. And then we find disappointment, and we find all kinds of things, I would say even trouble, that we've stirred up because of the fact that we've taken matters in our own hands. All along God's been saying, "Wait." Some of the reasons why He is calling us to wait is so that we might mature. We're not thinking right. It's just like a young person, "Can I drive the car?" "You need to wait." "I don't understand why I can't drive." I couldn't really comprehend, "Why can't I drive when I'm 10?" I just couldn't really comprehend that. But my father insisted that I get my license. So, I did. But the point is that there has to be some time under the

bridge for you to mature. You have to begin to see things differently. God is patient. In the fact that we go ahead of Him and begin to try to manipulate things and try to strategize, and in Abraham's particular case, not only strategizing, but deceptively strategizing in the sense of trying to pass his wife off as his sister. And I would say, he begins to overcompensate for the concerns that he has for Lot. I mean, there are all kinds of things that we do in the wrong manner that actually bring more pain and sorrow and more difficulty than actually helping. I mean, we're supposed to be a blessing, and we're causing consternation to the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh's going, "What are you doing to me? You know, I was living a pretty good life, and you brought your wife in? You lied to me. What are you doing?" And God says, "Okay, Abraham, we're going to leave here, but I'll leave giving this guy a blessing in spite of yourself." And so, God does that throughout. However, it's about time to grow up. Now, what's interesting about this passage is that it is now about 12 to 13 years, probably maybe even getting to the realm of 14, that he goes from Chapter 16, at the

end of Chapter 16, in verse 16, it says that he's 86 years old, right? Then you go into Chapter 17 and verse 1, and Abraham is now 99. So, now we've jumped. Well, all that blank space between those two chapters, what's going on? Have you ever thought about that? What was Abraham doing all that time? You're looking at 12, 13 years. What is he doing? And the best answer that I have for you is that he's growing up. Now, there's a, I would say, similitude in this in the sense that what you have is an interesting example of what is going on with a son that has been born.

If you look back in Chapter 16, it says,

(Genesis 16:15) “So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.”

Of course, “God hears and God answers”. So, he now has a son. So, for 12 to 13 years, he's raising a son. He's investing his life in a son. Now, what's interesting about the Jewish thought, and obviously it's a divine thought, in the establishment of maturity. I think one of the most interesting classes that I took at the university that wasn't necessarily biblical was human growth and development.

And I've often told people, I said, "You ought to take that class, especially if you're going to have kids." Because it helps you understand that at different stages, children mature in different ways at different levels; so that at a very early stage they may be thinking more concrete, but as they grow older, they can actually think in abstract ideas like love and relationship and things like that. Up to that point when they're younger, they're thinking, "Give me something like a toy," you know? "This shows that you love me because you give me something." And you see that really in the Old Testament, the beginning of the nation of Israel, you know, give, give, give, give, give, and it's all about immaturity. But there comes a point where you've got to grow up. And the reason why you have to grow up is because you're not going to be happy being a child. I mean, 6'1", 6'2", 6'3", now you're a big baby sucking your thumb. You're not going to be happy doing that. And God has called us to mature. And it is in that maturing that we actually find joy and happiness. When does that actually occur? Well, in the Jewish mindset, it actually begins at around age 12; almost the distance of time that we have from Ishmael's birth to this now 99th

year of Abraham. We have actually, I would say, Ishmael coming into his own is now, as the Jews will ultimately say, he is at the age of bar mitzvah, which is to say “bar” meaning “son,” “mitzvah” meaning “law”. He is the son of the law, which means that at this age he has owned the law for himself. He is no longer doing what he's doing because he's told to do it. He actually wants to do it. He's becoming a man.

In Luke 2, you see Jesus at the age of 12. And He goes into the temple and His parents' kind of lose Him and they go, “Where have you been?” He goes,” Am I not supposed to be about My Father's business? I mean, why do you think I'm here? I'm old enough now.” Nevertheless, He submitted to His parents, but the point of the matter was it was a time of growing up.

Well, Paul will make reference to this in the Book of Galatians, and in Galatians in particular in Chapter 3, as you go into Chapter 4, he'll talk about the Law, and the Law was a tutor, like something that teaches you and trains you while you're young and tells you, “You can't do that,” and “You can do that,” when you're young. But this

passage goes on to say, the Law was a tutor to lead us to Christ. In other words, the goal of the Law wasn't the Law itself. The goal of the Law was to get you to understand what right and wrong was so that when you got to this age of feeling things and owning it for yourself, you would own what is right yourself. So, you would become mature, so to speak. So, as he goes on in Galatians 4, and I'm not turning to it for a reason because I'm just not going to have time to go through all the text, but as you go into that passage, he emphasizes, "Now, all of these things happened and we were trained under the Law," but he says, "When Christ came, the fullness of time came in." Now, when he's talking about "the fullness of time," it's the age. In other words, maturity, the age of maturity. And what he's talking about in the passage is, when you receive Christ, you go into the realm of maturity; you now receive the Spirit. It goes on to say in Galatians 4, you've now received the Spirit of God's Son, which cries out, "Abba! Father!" In other words, you want to do the will of your Father. You have the same heart. You began to work in that same realm. So, it's the age of growing up.

There's a passage, and I will have you turn to this one, that's very familiar, but just to help you see it in the context. One of the problems with the Corinthians is that they weren't growing up. And if you look with me in 1 Corinthians 13. Of course, as you go through the book of 1 Corinthians in particular, they're arguing about what group they're with. I mean, I remember as kids, we'd have little groups. I won't go into the detail of mine, but mine was a "bug club." But we all had little groups that we were in, and we were all competing with one another in that realm. Paul starts off by going, "Some of you are saying, 'I'm of Apollos, I'm of Paul, I'm of Cephas.' What are you talking about? We're all of Christ." But that's a sign of immaturity. He goes on to talk about the fact that "I wish that I could talk to you like adults, but you're just babies; you're just acting like infants." And then he makes mention of not only that they have gross immorality and sin in their midst, but they're laughing about it. But that would be a kid. An immature kid laughs about doing what's wrong. See?

And then you go into Chapter 6, and they're taking one another to court. You know, he goes, "Why not rather be wrong? Wouldn't that be the adult thing to do?" They're going into places where they're causing other people to stumble and they go, "I don't care. I can do what I want to do." Well, that's the way a kid thinks. He doesn't think in terms of, "Well, I need to be thinking of others." So, all the way through the book, he makes mention of those immature thoughts, even when they come in 1 Corinthians 11 and they're taking the Lord's Supper. And how are they doing that? Well, they're fighting over the food, at the Lord's Supper! One tries to be first, and they're trying to push other people out of the seats. And he says, "The whole reason that you're gathered together is to unite. You're doing the very opposite."

So, in 1 Corinthians 13, it then states this,

(1 Corinthians 13:1) "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

(1 Corinthians 13:2) If I have the gift of prophecy..."

I mean, you can have a kid that's a genius, but he's still immature. In fact, he's probably more dangerous than all the other kids, because he's smart enough to do real destruction.

“If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:3) And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body...”

See, everything within the text is, “Well, I did this, I did this.” I can just hear an immature individual going, “Well, I did everything I was supposed to do.” And you can hear the voice of God going, “Yeah, but did you love Me?” Well, that's a minor detail, right? It is the point.

So, he begins to describe in verse 4,

(1 Corinthians 13:4) “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous...”

Well, all these are maturing qualities. This is an adult, if I can put it this way. Because an adult is patient, right? An adult is thinking of being kind. They're somebody that's

not jealous. They're not bragging. They're not arrogant. They don't act unbecomingly. Kids act unbecomingly, but not an adult. You don't seek your own. I mean, if you sought your own, you would never take care of your own kids, right? Nobody would ever take care of them. You're not provoked. You don't take into account a wrong suffered. If you did, you would kick your kid out the first time they said they hated you.

(1 Corinthians 13:6) “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

(1 Corinthians 13:7) bears all things, believes all things...”

I mean, there's endurance in maturity. There is.

(1 Corinthians 13:8) “Love never fails...”

Now, this is why he states in verse 11,

(1 Corinthians 13:11) “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

So, the whole point of the matter is that there has to be some growth and there has to be some maturing and you have to stop thinking of yourself. And this is time that you

start thinking of others. And this is when the child comes into manhood because he's no longer just thinking of, "What's in it for me?" And the wonderful thing about the Book of Genesis is you begin to see this maturation process. Because you start off in the garden and God has given you everything. You didn't have to do anything. You didn't have to earn it. You didn't have to work for it. You just have everything. Can you imagine that? It's like a kid born in a household. He just has everything. And if he doesn't get his milk fast enough, he'll let you know. But then as the time goes on, how can you have a relationship with somebody that's selfish? And does God not want a relationship with us?

He involves Noah in His work of rescuing. And you see an interesting tie there begin to form. But now with Abram, He goes, "It's time." And in Chapter 17, that's what this chapter is about. There has been alongside of him the maturation of Ishmael, which here again, God has been very patient. They went ahead and pushed the agenda of having Hagar be the surrogate, so to speak. And so, because of that, they now have this young man that God

had not intended, but we see that God has allotted for Abraham to take time to be with this boy. And I would say this, that that's going to be an important point because within a year or two, maybe three at the most, Sarah's going to say, "The boy needs to leave." Well, once again, it's the grace of God to let him grow up enough to where he can be on his own. Because now he's like 15, 16, 17, and he's able to be on his own. I was talking to someone the other day and they were saying, "I just can't get my son out of my house." I said, "Well, how old is he?" "He's 26." And I said, "Really?" I said, "So, why does he remain in your house?" "Well, he's in college." And I said, "Well, that's a long college." "Oh, he keeps changing his majors." I said, "Well, I've known professional students, and they continue to change their major in order for their parents to continue to support them." But it is interesting that God will literally say, "Let the boy go," at the age of around 16 or 17. But anyway, as you come into the passage, you begin to understand that that's happening simultaneously to now God dealing with Abram, and He goes, "Now, it's time for you to grow up." So, what Abram can see happening here as he's training as a father, he can

also understand as God begins to talk to him, “Let's get moving now.”

So, the passage starts off this way in Chapter 17,

(Genesis 17:1) “Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty...””

I actually thought at first that He would say, “I am Yahweh,” and give His personal name. But not in this text. He uses the term which we would even sing, “El Shaddai,” the name God Almighty. And His point is going to be very strong at first, “I control everything.”

Now, as He states this, He then goes on and says,

“... Walk before Me, and be blameless.”

Now, I don't believe that because He declared Himself “El Shaddai,” that at that juncture He was being harsh on him. I think He was giving confidence to him. “I can control anything, so don't you keep trying to control stuff. I'm the controller of all things.” We oftentimes use the phrase, “Lord of hosts,” or “*šābā*” in the Hebrew, which means over every molecule, over every planet, over all

the universe, everything; God is in control. So, it's a great picture of His control. "I am God Almighty. So, quit trying to subvert My plan by virtue of you taking the reins. I'll do it." And that's what faith is about, right? Faith is believing that God is the One that does it.

So, He uses a phrase, if you look in the text, "walk before Me". Now, I just want to break this down. "Walk before Me," it's a manner of life, right? When you're walking with God, you're walking before Him. When He uses the word "before," it's not simply in the presence, but it actually is literally translated "face". So, it's like "Walk in front of My face." His point is that "I want you to be up front with Me." If you're talking behind somebody's back, you're not up front with them. "So, the way I want you to walk with Me is let's be transparent." Now, why would God say that? Because Abraham hasn't been transparent. I mean, there was an event with his wife where his wife goes, "I think we're going to need to take the reins here." Now, at the beginning of Chapter 16, you would think, "Wow, that's a good time to talk to God about it." He doesn't talk to God. In fact, what he does is he kind of

goes around and he begins to plan some stuff with his wife, and he does what his wife tells him to do. And, well, here again, you know where they ended up, with the problems that then ultimately ensue of this. God will use it for good in spite of them. Nevertheless, they've gone ahead and God says, "Okay, here's the deal. I'm the one in charge. You need to talk to Me about everything." Now, that's going to be a huge leap. This is a huge transition. It's really that which translates us into the realm of maturity, because as head of the house, we should be talking to God about everything instead of asking everybody else. Immaturity is going around asking everybody else, maybe perhaps in some ways trying to get consensus about what we want to do. But talking to God is you walking by faith, which is a mature act of trusting in God yourself and hearing from Him specifically. "So, I need you to walk transparently before Me. I need you to be before My face. I need to be involved in the decisions that you're making. Walk before Me."

Now, the last phrase that He uses in the text is, "and be blameless". When He's talking about blameless, we think

in terms of, well, perfection, and perfection is kind of in the word as well, and we oftentimes think in terms of a finished work, and that's kind of in the word as well. But in the context, and I often emphasize this, you get into a dictionary and you start looking at a particular word, sometimes you can have like 5, 6, sometimes 20 definitions of that particular word. You don't use all those definitions. You use a definition that fits within the text. And so, the definition of this word that fits within the passage, and we'll see it as it goes on, is that it has the sense of being unimpaired. In other words, you're walking uprightly unimpaired. Now, the question is, what has been impairing me? What has been the impediment? And the answer to that is, you going your own way.

Fundamentally, what God is saying is, "I'm the One in charge. We need to be transparent with each other." It kind of reminds me of Isaiah, "Come, let us reason together. Let's talk about this." Now, that's not God going, "You know, I'll get your opinion; you get My opinion." That's not what God's saying. God's saying, "You need to talk to Me about this." It goes back to Proverbs 3:5-6, right? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean to

your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him....” So, that's you being transparent and walking before Him in transparency. And you're coming before Him and you're going, “What do You want me to do? I mean, You know best.” “Yeah, I'm El Shaddai. I know best. So, come and talk to Me about these things.” And it's comforting to me as well that God actually wants me to come and talk to Him, you know? James will say, “Look, if you lack wisdom, talk to God. He gives to all men generously.” He's not going to get mad at you because you're asking Him for help. Go talk to Him about it. But stop impeding the progress by doing your own thing. See? That's what begins to happen. And after a while, I mean, let's see if we can put it in the terms of the context that we've been talking about; you take a kid along with you, and he really hasn't matured. And you might tell people, “This is my little helper.” And then you give your little helper a hammer. And then you stop watching them after a while, and then you look at the destruction that they've done to your car. And you realize, “Can you just stop breaking things long enough for us to fix what we're here for?” And that's fundamentally what God is saying to

Abraham, “I want you to get on board with Me. Let's do this thing together.”

Now, the wonderful thing about this is that He goes on and states in verse 2,

(Genesis 17:2) “I will establish...”

Or “I will actually give,” in the cohortative, which makes reference to the fact that there is a personal resolve from God in this. In other words, God is saying, “I'm invested in this.” Let's just pull it all together. “What are you invested in?” “I'm invested in us working together.”

And that's the way He words this, if you look in the passage,

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply...”

“I mean, we're going to do a lot of stuff together. We're going to get a lot done.”

“... I will multiply you exceedingly.”

And you're going to see this “exceedingly” thing and “multiply” over and over again. But the point is that God wants to bless us. He wants to see things get done. He

wants to see people get helped. He wants you to be blessed exceedingly, and He wants others to come to Him and the nations to be blessed. So, let's get working. We've got a job to do. Quit impeding. Quit trying to do this on your own, because the moment you start doing it on your own, the moment you think you know exactly what needs to be done, you're going to start doing damage. And now, we've got to wait another 12, 13 years before we can get back on target. "So, walk before me, be blameless, quit being impaired in this."

There's an interesting passage, and I don't know if I'm out of time, but if you turn with me to Psalm 84. There are just certain verses that just stick with you and become some of your favorites. One of my favorites is verse 11 of Psalm 84.

(Psalm 84:11) "For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD gives grace and glory;
No good thing does He withhold..."

Have you heard me repeat that over and over again? It's because I like it a lot.

"... from those who walk uprightly."

Let's just read the verse together. The Lord is God; the Lord God is a sun and a shield. He's light, He's hope, He's the sustainer of all things. He's actually the source of life, and He's the One that directs us and guides us. What an interesting picture, just to capsulize it in one word, "sun". And He's your shield. Look at the passage. Not only is He your protector, but He's your security. He's the One that cares for you in times of attacks, in times of physical and emotional hurt. He protects you. What a wonderful way to capsulize it.

"The LORD gives grace...

His favor.

"... and glory..."

He'll give you honor and splendor. You go, "Eh, I don't want all the honor." Oh, yeah, you want it from Him.

"Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He'll exalt you." And the glory and the grace, I mean, God removes all of the depression and oppression in your life, and your face is shining all the time. Where does that come from? Well, that's His splendor upon you.

“... No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

He uses the same word, “*tāmîm*,” that he uses for “blameless” in Genesis. “To those that walk unimpeded by their own wills, by their own desires.” You're walking with integrity. You're not thinking of your way of doing things. You're thinking of, “What's Your way of doing things?” You're attaching yourself to a covenant with Him. You're making a commitment with Him together. “From now on, we're working together.”

2 Corinthians 6:1 says, as Paul begins to write this particular chapter,

“And working together with Him...”

Can you think of anything more wonderful than to work together with God? Unfortunately, so many of us are actually impairing the work of God by virtue of doing things our way. We get in our little imagination and we go, “I think I have a better idea.” I mean, you're not “Ford,” first of all, but you don't have a better idea. The better idea comes from God, and you want to walk according to His way.

What's interesting about this particular chapter, Psalm 84, is that within the text, he talks about dwelling with God, being with God.

In fact, his statement is in verse 10,

(Psalm 84:10) “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside.

I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God

Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

“Threshold” is really kind of a picture of one who is the doorkeeper. And it was the humblest of the positions. So, what he's saying is, “I'd rather have the humblest position.” Now, this is interesting because it's actually written by the sons of Korah, which if you recall in Numbers, it was Korah's Rebellion that says, “Who are you to be the boss?” And they began to elevate themselves. So, now the sons of Korah are saying, “You know what, we don't want the elevated position that we derive from our own desires. We would rather be a servant in Your courts.” And they're almost reversing that

whole curse, I would say, of the sons of Korah, wouldn't you?

But his statement is, if you look with me in verse 5,

(Psalm 84:5) “How blessed is the man whose strength is in You,

In whose heart are the highways to Zion!”

Now, he's given an interesting picture of a pilgrimage going to Jerusalem. And as the pilgrimage went to Jerusalem, they would have to pass through difficult places. And one of the places that they would have to pass through, they call it the Baca Valley, which “Baca” makes reference to weeping.

His statement is, if you look in the passage,

(Psalm 84:6) “Passing through the valley of Baca...”

Yeah, that's the valley of weeping.

His point is that on the journey to dwell with God, it's not going to be easy. You're going to go through, and in this particular region, it was an arid place, it was a dry place, and oftentimes there was no water, and so that even made the journey more difficult. And thus, one of the

reasons why there was weeping going through. It was not an easy journey. But often in the process of the journey, as they were going to the feast, God would bring the early rains, and they would begin to get relief as they were heading towards; because every feast was a celebration of the ingathering of the different fruits, and God would send the rains during these times. So, they would begin to feel these things.

And so, the way it reads is,

“Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring;
The early rain also covers it with blessings.

(Psalm 84:7) They go from strength to strength,
Every one of them appears before God in Zion.”

In other words, the difficulty, the hardship, as unpleasant and inconvenient as a path of vexation was, has now become a relief. It's almost like now they begin to almost see Zion, “I can see Zion, and it was all worth it.”

And so, he begins to cry out in verse 8,

(Psalm 84:8) “O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
Give ear, O God of Jacob!

(Psalm 84:9) Behold our shield, O God,
And look upon the face of Your anointed.”

And then he says,

(Psalm 84:10) “For a day in Your courts is better...”

His point is, “It was all worth it. It was all worth it.”

When he states in verse 11, and this is the tie that I wanted to bring in, “to those who walk uprightly,” that is to say, unimpeded in their way, and I would say this, that oftentimes when we take a wrong turn, it isn't a wrong turn in sense of mentally or comfort. Because when we take the wrong turn, we're usually drawn to something more comfortable or more convenient or more immediate in some sort of relief. But God says, “Stay the course. The hardship is worth it.” And where he adds this, and I just want to emphasize this, “no good thing does He withhold,” he's talking about the difficult times as James does in James 1, as well as the good times. And what he's making reference to is that hard track was good for you. “It's bringing character; it's building you. And I'm not going to withhold that from you.” I mean, what father would withhold character-building traits from his son?

Not one good thing. I mean, we read the verse and we go, "Okay, so everything He gives me is going to be happy." Well, ultimately, but as you're walking through the desert, God is also giving you discipline, He's training you, He's giving you endurance, and He's causing you to put your trust in Him, and He's causing you to no longer hold on to the world, but to long for the presence of God. And you're now willing to even be a servant in His door, than look for the high position. But surprisingly enough, you'll actually be happier doing that. It's an interesting process that he gives reference to. My point being that he's making reference to an unimpeded, unimpaired way of living. And when God says, "I don't want you to walk your way anymore, I want you to walk by faith," and look, if we were honest, we would all say like Abraham, "But it's hard. It's not convenient. It's not easy." And God says, "That's right. But not one good thing am I going to withhold from you. And this is something that's good for you."

So, as we come to this, it is God that will say,

(Genesis 17:2) “I will establish My covenant between Me and you...”

And once again, He's making reference to this in the sense of a relationship.

“... And I will multiply you exceedingly.

(Genesis 17:3) Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him...”

Now, the question is, why did he fall on his face? And clearly, look, you can't rule out the fact that Almighty God is talking to him. And the very presence of God would put you to your knees, but I believe Abraham is coming to terms with how he's messed up. I think he's coming to terms because when God says, “Okay, we need to stop impeding,” I think Abraham's coming to terms with the fact, “I have. I have done that. But I'm not going to anymore.” And when God says, “We're going to work together,” I think Abraham's going, “We're going to work together.” And, as he will ultimately come and God will warn him about Sodom and Gomorrah, as obviously Abraham will be concerned for Lot as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, guess what Abraham will do

differently? He won't go in there to rescue him. He'll talk to God and God will rescue him. That's very interesting. So, he stops this process of going in with his little army and rescuing somebody. So, you begin to see a change. And I think in verse 3, you're seeing the change of Abraham as he begins to fall on his face, and he talks with God.

And God says,

(Genesis 17:4) “As for Me...”

And you might want to underline the phrase because He's going to say here, “As for me,” and a little bit later on, He's going to say, “As for you, Abraham.” And then He's going to turn to Sarah, and He goes, “As for you, Sarah.” So, it's like we all have a role in this. Why is He doing that? Because He's saying, “We're going to work together.” Now, why is it so important that everybody work together? And the answer is this, working together brings you together when you work together for a higher call than you. And that's what unites hearts. You'll pick that up very strongly in Philippians. Because one of his concerns, as Paul writes to the Philippians, is the fact that

there's some division among them. And these are good people. But the problem is they've lost their focus. And their focus has ceased to be salvation of others, and it's gone in on themselves. And because of that, they become very anxious about everything. That's why he says, "Be anxious for nothing" in Chapter 4. Because anxiety comes about when you're just worried about, "Well, what about me?" That's where anxiety comes from. But as you begin to think of others, and more specifically, as you begin to focus on the kingdom, remember it's in Philippians 3 that Paul will say, "This one thing I do. Forgetting the things that lie behind, I press on towards the mark of the high calling." What is he talking about? Well, he's talking about uniting the body of Christ. This is what you need to do. And so, you go into Chapter 2, and he says, "If there's any fellowship, let's have the same purpose. Let's do the same thing." And this is what unites churches. This is what brings us together. But more than anything, it unites you to God when you're working to fulfill His will. People say, "I wish I could be closer to God." This is where you'd be closer to God. Start working together with Him instead of working against Him. Stop thinking your plans, and just

say, “What will You have me do? And how can I proclaim the gospel? And how can we bless others by virtue of You?” Because only blessing comes from God.

So, He declares this when He comes to Abraham, in verse 4,

(Genesis 17:4) “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you...”

This is that strong relationship that He's emphasizing within the text. The “with” there is a very interesting propinquity, would probably be the word that's used, in which it gives a sense of God desiring to draw near. So, the way the Hebrew word kind of works is that God is basically turning to Abram, and He goes, “I do want to be close to you. And this is how we're going to do it.”

So, He establishes this in verse 4,

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.”

“*Hāmôn*” is the word that He's going to use. This is why we get the word “‘*āb hāmôn*,” which is “Abraham,” that is

to say, “a father of many”. It would be the name that is used.

So, the text reads,

(Genesis 17:5) “No longer shall your name be called Abram...”

What is that? Well, it actually means, “‘āb̄”. We sometimes use the word “‘āb̄,” but probably more pronounced “A-V”. But “‘āb̄” within the text is making reference to “father”. “Rām” is making reference to “exalted”. Well, interesting description. I don't know if it's his father that named him. We know that he came out of Ur of Chaldeans. And we know that probably in some way there was some sort of compensation, and maybe because Abraham was highly respected, people just called him “exalted father”. But God says, “Not exaltation from doing nothing, but what we're going to do is something real, and you will be a father of many.” So, He really replaces that. And once again, I think personally it was kind of involved in the occult of worshiping the moon and the heavens, so exalting the stars, or the father of the

stars. But anyway, we know he came out of Ur of the Chaldeans.

“No longer shall your name be called Abram,
But your name shall be Abraham;
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.”

So, God is actually changing his name.

Now, what's interesting is in verse 5,

“... your name shall be...”

Up to that point, verse 5, it starts off,

“... No longer shall your name be called...”

So, what He's saying is, “People are calling you this, but that doesn't make it so.” But He goes on and says,

“But your name shall be...”

And when God declares something, He uses the term, “*hāyâ*,” which is to create something out of nothing. So, He's fundamentally saying, “But I'm going to make you a father of many nations.” You know, we all call each other something, but that doesn't mean we are. And God says, “I'm going to make you.” So, that's the big difference in all of this.

(Genesis 17:6) “I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.

(Genesis 17:7) I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.”

And once again, that's the relationship. We're going to have a relationship, then we're going to pass this relationship on to others. It kind of reminds me of Deuteronomy 6, right? Fathers, okay, when you rise up, when you walk by the way, when you sit down, whatever, you talk to your kids about that, let them know you've got a relationship with God. And it's by virtue of the way that you act, that more is caught than taught, by the way that you act and by the way that you actually walk with God in a very transparent way.

We were talking about prayer in the men's group. We were talking about the phases of change in the way that we see prayer. And to me, the major way that prayer has changed in my life is it has become more of a

conversation. I'm talking to God about this, I'm walking by the way, and I'm going, "Can you help me here?" You know, different ways. But I'm turning to God in almost everything in my life, and it's becoming a conversation. It's becoming a relationship, and it's becoming a thing of fellowship. So, what He's talking about is that's going to happen to you and you're going to bring it to others.

We're running out of time, but there are a few points that I want to emphasize within the passage up to this point. And I'm just going to put it into simple terms. What is God asking from you? What I would say the first thing that God is asking from you is that He wants to work together. He wants you to work together with Him. And you get that wonderful passage, obviously, in 2 Corinthians 6:1, where Paul makes emphasis of that.

When you come to the end of Titus 2, he says, "You do know the reason I called you was that you would begin to proclaim the good works and live the good works that I have come to proclaim." So, we're called not just to get a "get out of jail free pass." God has actually called us for the purpose of doing good. In other words, when He

opens up the bars of the prison, He says, "Let's get to work." And you get that picture as well when you're reading Hebrews 12, even when people have gone through difficult times, God goes, "Okay, but let's patch you up so you can go work again or get back in the field because we've got souls to save." So, if you're living and breathing, it's not for you to sit around just going, "We dodged that bullet." The whole reason why you're breathing is because God is wanting you to serve Him and He's wanting you to work His way. So, fundamentally, He's saying, "Let's get together; let's work together." The second thing that He's saying within the passage is, "Stop impairing. Stop doing things your way. You've got to come to Me; you've got to talk to Me about this." You've got to do it the right way, which would be that blameless way of doing things. And if at any point in time you just start getting in your own head, or you find yourself questioning things, "Well, I don't know this about the Bible." You know what the problem is? You've gotten in your own head. You're thinking through this yourself rather than going to Scripture and going, "What does God say? What does He want me to do?" And you're focusing on what

everybody else is doing rather than what God is telling you to do. “But my wife told me to do this.” “Stop. What did I say to do?” And you begin to listen to Him. So, stop impairing, stop impeding.

The third thing that He does really within the passage is He literally says, “You need to walk openly and honestly in front of Me.” In other words, “Come to Me with everything.” This is where that conversation comes into play, “Walk before My face.” You're having a problem with something, I think if most of us were Abraham, we'd go, “You know, it's been quite a few years since You gave me a promise. We're now at 10, and I still don't have a kid. So, what are we going to do about this?” God says, “Well, let's just talk about it. Let's talk about it.” But instead, you know, we try to work it out. So, He wants you to be open and honest about these things, and I don't know why we sometimes are reticent about that, because I think sometimes, we think, “I don't want to go into all the detail.” God already knows all the detail.

And then last but not least, and here again, we didn't have time to finish the passage, but He's very clear in the text, you need to think big.

I mean, read it with me, at the end of verse 2,

“... I will multiply you exceedingly.”

(Genesis 17:4) “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,

And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.”

(Genesis 17:5) “...For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.”

(Genesis 17:6) “I will make you exceedingly fruitful...”

“And the covenant that I make with you is like forever.”

What does He say in verse 7? “And as for you, it's a forever covenant. It's going to be forever. “Oh, I don't know. I don't think I can do this.” Stop thinking small. God doesn't think small. God wants to bless you exceedingly. You go, “Well, who am I? I don't have that much longer to live.” Well, like I said, the man on the cross only had a few minutes to live. But God thought big. And by virtue of his confession, that confession has ministered to thousands,

millions of people. Think about big. That's huge. In just a few minutes. That's where Scripture says make the most of your time, but don't limit God. Obviously, in your hands, you couldn't do anything. You couldn't feed the multitudes. But in God's hands, just a few fish, some bread, no big deal.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You, and we ask You to work in our hearts. It's our nature to not do things right. And part of that is just immaturity. But there is a time that You come in our life where You go, "It's time to grow up. It's time to stop just thinking about yourself and it's time to help somebody else. And we're going to work together. We're going to get this done. We're going to bless a lot of people, you and Me." And He pulls you next to Him, and He says, "And this is a promise." So, we come before You today, and we attach ourselves to this covenant to be used by You. As long as You have us breathing this air, may we be used by You. As Jesus would say, "It's still

daytime. The night's coming when you can't work. It's still day.”

With your head's bowed and your eyes closed, what we're asking you to do is talk with God. It's a good time to start your conversation with Him. It's a good time to get on the right road. There are a lot of things that would call you off of it. Most of them are convenient, easy things, but you need to be willing to go through that desert, let the weeping occur, so that you can actually appreciate everything that God has given you.