

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 3
God Is In Control & We Can Trust Him. Genesis 12-50
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Just about everyday of our lives you and I are challenged to put our trust in something or someone. The word *trust* implies that a person or thing is reliable, that we can count on it or them.

Many years ago an Assyrian soldier challenged Hezekiah, King of Judah, “*In whom or what do you put your trust?*” (2 Kings 18) That is the question I want us to think about. At the very center of our being, what or who do we trust?

In Genesis 12-50 one theme stands out from everything else, God is in control, we can trust Him. This is illustrated through **four great examples**: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. In the New Testament these men are considered the patriarchs or fathers of faith (Hebrews 11:8-22). I want us to think about each of them briefly that we might see how God’s control is illustrated in their lives and be challenged through them to more fully trust God ourselves.

I. Abraham

Abraham’s life is described in Genesis 12-25. With Abraham we find God constantly making and remaking the point that He is in control and can be trusted. We find this right at the very start of Abraham’s relationship with God. See Genesis 12:1-4...

God called Abraham to leave the place he lived and the people he lived with to go to a place He would show him. With this call God also made some promises: He promised to make a great nation of him, to bless him and make his name great, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. Abraham was faced with a big decision, whether to take God at His Word and go, or to simply stay. Verse 4 tells us that Abraham went. Hebrews 11:8 adds that he went by faith. Abraham put his trust in God.

Throughout the New Testament, wherever we find Abraham’s name, close by we also find the word *faith*. This gives us the impression that Abraham was kind of a superman of faith. It appears he didn’t experience the kind of

doubts you and I sometimes do, or that he never had faith struggles in his decisions. We see a man, who in Genesis 22 was told by God to take his son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering, and without any hesitation packed his things, took his son, and headed for the place of sacrifice. Hebrews 11:19 tells us that Abraham believed God would raise him again from the dead. That is super faith!

But there was a lot of learning and growing to take place in Abraham's life between chapters 12 and 22.

In chapter 12, there was a famine in the land so Abraham went to Egypt. Because of the beauty of his wife he was afraid someone would kill him for her and so he told everyone she was his sister. God had to use the ungodly Pharaoh of Egypt to rebuke Abraham and send him back where he belonged.

In chapter 13, God restated His promises and told Abraham to look around, as far as he could see it would belong to him and his descendants.

In chapter 15, Abraham is full of fear and doubts; he tells God, "*You have given me no seed.*" Look at what then happens in verses 4-7...

This represents a strategic moment in Abraham's life emotionally and spiritually. In Romans 4, the Apostle Paul calls it his moment of salvation.

But in chapter 16, Abraham again acts according to the flesh, at his wife's suggestion; he sleeps with her handmaid Hagar and has a child with her called Ishmael.

Again in chapter 17, God restates His promise, but Abraham struggles to believe it being 99 years old. He pleads with God that Ishmael might be the seed of promise, but God says no, saying the promise would be through him and Sarah.

In chapter 18, God again restates His promise. Verse 11 says that both Abraham and Sarah were well-stricken in years. When Sarah heard the promise she laughed in unbelief. But the Lord responded in verse 14, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*"

In chapter 21, Isaac, the child of promise, was born, and God again reminded Abraham of His promises.

Through all of this, we see Abraham on a roller coaster emotionally and spiritually, struggling to take God at His Word, just like you and I do. But through all of it, God patiently reminded him of His promises, telling him that He was in control and could be counted on. That's why God waited until Abraham and Sarah were well beyond the age of child-bearing to prove that nothing is too hard for the Lord and therefore we can trust Him.

You and I face moments of decision in our lives on a regular basis as to whether we are going to trust God's control, or take control ourselves. The example of Abraham teaches us that even though, in those moments, taking self control might seem like the easiest thing to do; trusting God is still the right choice because He really is the One in control.

II. Isaac

In Genesis 25-26 we are provided the example of Isaac's life. Isaac was the child of promise that Abraham and Sarah waited so long for. With all the build up, starting in chapter 12, we're almost disappointed at how little Isaac stands out.

By nature, it seems, we have high expectations for certain individuals. I'm sure his parents told Isaac, with all the promises; God had special plans for him

I'm sure after having his hands tied, being laid on an altar, and his dad ready to make a sacrifice of him, that Isaac must have been left with the impression that God had special plans for him.

But we find nothing particularly special. We are left wondering, what are we to learn from this man? Well, quite plainly, Isaac's life was wrapped up in the promises of God.

In chapter 25, I appreciate the way both he and his wife Rebekah respond to trouble. First, Rebekah was barren. What did Isaac do? See verse 21...

Second, after Rebekah conceived, her pregnancy was difficult. What did she do? See verse 22...

When faced with personal trouble this couple knew who to go to, and what a tremendous example they are for us. By doing so, they recognized God's control in their lives and circumstances.

In chapter 26, we find Isaac committing the same sin of his father; telling others that his wife was his sister, but we also see something more; through the rest of the chapter he is presented as a well-digger. That strikes us as being very unimportant, but not when you consider the alternative. I come from a family of well-diggers. I have two uncles who spent their adult life digging wells in the hills of eastern Tennessee. Down there if you don't have a well, you don't have water. At the very least it was that important in Isaac's day, but his wells were even more significant. See verse 18...

By re-digging the wells of his father and giving them the same names as Abraham, Isaac was acting on the promises of God. God had promised the land to Abraham and his seed, so Isaac was claiming his inheritance. In turn, look at what happened in verse 24...

God appeared to Isaac and affirmed the promises He had made to Abraham.

I was looking at the various references to Isaac in the New Testament and came across one I thought especially striking. See Galatians 4:28...

If we know Jesus Christ as Savior; we are to live like children of promise. That's what Isaac did when he reclaimed the wells of his father, and that's the example he left for us. He believed God was in control and so he lived in light of God's promises. He trusted God.

III. Jacob

Isaac had two sons Esau and Jacob. Jacob is used as the third great example for us in Genesis. His life is covered in chapters 25-36. Now, I don't like everything I see in Jacob's life and if you have read these chapters lately I am sure you don't either, but through all the ins and outs of Jacob's life we see the gracious hand of God moving him in the direction he needed to go, and into the person he needed to be.

God's plan for Jacob's life was revealed to his mother even before he was born. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter 9 this was done so that

God's control might be evident. But God's control does not seem so evident through much of his life does it? Most often it is Jacob's control we see.

Although they were twins, Esau was born first which meant he possessed the birthright and family blessing. We are told in chapter 25 that Isaac and Rebekah had favorites. Jacob was Rebekah's favorite. You get the impression that she had told Jacob that God had said the older would serve the younger and he was determined to make that happen. He caught Esau in a moment of weakness, purchased his birthright, and then in chapter 27, with his mama's help, deceived his dad and stole his brother's blessing. What happened was God's will, but it was certainly not done God's way. Jacob was taking matters into his own hands and would reap the consequences of it for years to come.

To protect him from Esau's anger, Rebekah had Isaac send Jacob away to the home of her brother to find a wife. On his journey, the first night an interesting thing happened, he had a dream. See 28:12-19...

The blessing of Abraham and Isaac became the blessing of Jacob by God's promise. That did not mean he deserved it. It was an act of God's grace. Neither did it mean his sins were being overlooked. He would reap the consequences of them for years to come. Nor did it mean he was ready to give God control of his life. That would not happen for another 20 years. But God was establishing with Jacob that He was in fact the One in control, and would remind him of this occasion years later. See 31:13...

Have you noticed with some people who have everything going their way that they seem to have a knack for messing up their lives? Well, Jacob was like that. What a mess he created for himself in chapters 29-31: two wives, two concubines, twelve children, mistrust and jealousy in his home, and a father-in-law who cheated him every chance he got. But through all of it Jacob slowly learned that he really was not in control. See 32:9-12...

Jacob had been humbled through the circumstances of his life. He was no longer demanding and taking his rights but acknowledging his unworthiness, and God's promises and control. Years later, in chapter 35, he is able to look back and say to his family that God was in control the whole time.

How much easier that could have been if Jacob would have understood that earlier in life rather than later. And that's the point you and I need to get.

The sooner we recognize God's control and put our trust in Him, the better it is going to be for us.

I like what it says in 1 Peter 5:6-7, *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

IV. Joseph

In the final chapters of Genesis, one of Jacob's sons becomes our fourth great example, Joseph. He was Jacob's favorite son because he was the first born of Rachel.

We are introduced to Joseph in chapter 37 at age 17. He had big dreams given to him by God, but they seemed empty at the time. His brothers hated him so much they sold him as a slave for 20 pieces of silver, and then reported to their father that a wild animal had killed him.

For the next 13 years his life seemed to simply slide downhill. In chapter 39 he is a slave to Potiphar in Egypt, for awhile things seemed to go very well but then he is falsely accused by the wife of Potiphar and thrown in prison.

In chapter 40, he rises to a position of some comfort in prison and is able to help the butler of Pharaoh, who promises to help him in return, but then forgets about him for a couple of more years.

Through all of this, how do you think Joseph felt? If you were in his place: betrayed, enslaved, falsely accused, imprisoned, and forgotten, how would you feel, especially if someone then suggested to you that God was in control? Every indication of these chapters is that Joseph believed it. He believed God had a reason for it all! After interpreting Pharaoh's dreams in chapter 41, given the position of second in command over all of Egypt, and then being reunited with his brothers in chapter 45, he had an amazing testimony to share. See 45:5-8...

Later, after their father Jacob died, the brothers were afraid Joseph would take revenge, but listen to what he said to them in 50:19-20...

Isn't that amazing! Joseph saw God's hand for good in all the circumstances of his life. He knew God was in control and trusted Him.

That's the encouragement God still has for us today: He is in control and we can count on Him. See Romans 8:28-31...

With all his heart, Joseph believed that message, and it enabled him to live above every negative circumstance of his life.

What did God want Abraham to know? That He was in control and could be trusted.

What did God want Isaac to know? That He was in control and could be trusted.

What did God want Jacob to know? That He was in control and could be trusted.

What did God want Joseph to know? That He was in control and could be trusted.

What does God want you and me to know? That He is in control and we can trust Him.