

# Persevering Faith

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Date: 26 August 2012

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[0:00] More lessons about our God from the life of Abram. Genesis 13.

And God's word says, So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev with his wife and everything he had, and everything he had. And Lot went with him.

Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and in gold. From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar.

There Abram called on the name of the Lord. Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.

And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

[1:17] So Abram said to Lot, Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you?

Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left. Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt toward Zoar.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.

Abram lived in the land of Canaan while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west.

[2:32] All the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you. So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting can be hard. Waiting for your wedding day.

Waiting for Christmas. Waiting for Christmas. The best things always seem to take the longest, don't they? Looking back, I've had a wedding and I've had lots of Christmases.

It doesn't seem so bad, but when you're in it, seems like it's going to take forever, doesn't it? And we come to Genesis 13 and Abraham is waiting.

[3:43] God has promised him descendants. He's promised him land. And he's still waiting for those things. And Genesis 13 comes.

And Genesis 13 goes. And Abraham is still waiting. Hebrews 11 looks back on Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and the Israelites and all the Old Testament saints and says, These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. They were waiting and waiting. And brothers and sisters, we are still waiting to be made perfect.

God calls you to the same persevering faith that he called Abraham to. Faith that keeps holding on. Faith that keeps running even when you've hit the wall. You know what the wall is, right? When in marathon, people who run marathon distances or any sort of long distance runner, there's a place in the race where you hit the wall.

[5:03] And in the marathon, it's usually about mile 19. You aren't close enough to the end to see it. You aren't close enough to the end to feel like I'm almost done.

But you're so far along now, you can't turn around and stop. And this, I've heard, I'm never ever going to run this distance. So, you're tired.  
It doesn't seem like it's ever going to end. And you know what marathoners do when they've hit the wall? They keep running.  
They keep running. Why? Because the only way to go is forward. The prize is at the end. There's no prize for those who stop at mile 19. And so maybe you're there tonight at the wall.  
You're tired spiritually. Heaven and all of God's good promises seem far away. The world is looking good.  
[6:08] And the message of Genesis 13 is keep running. Keep running. Persevering faith is the only faith that wins the prize.

And so we're going to see three things about persevering faith tonight. And the first is that it starts over. It starts over. The first four verses of chapter 13 gives us a beautiful picture of Abraham starting over.  
Of repenting. Of beginning again. So, where was Abraham at the end of chapter 12? Well, he was in Egypt, wasn't he?

You remember there was a famine in the land. And he left the land of Canaan. He went down to Egypt. And it doesn't seem like he was trusting God to provide for him in the famine.  
And instead he puts his faith in the Nile and in Egypt. And that leads him into lying about Sarah. It seems like Abraham is trying to protect himself in his own way, in his own terms, without trusting God.

[7:18] And it got him into a lot of trouble. You remember that from a few weeks ago. And then God swooped in all of a sudden. But God did something. Very surprising grace at the last moment.

And he saved them from this terrible situation. And as Genesis 13 begins, Abraham is down in Egypt. And he says, he must say to himself, I'm going back.

I have to start over again. I've got to go back to where this began. It says in verse 1 that he went from Egypt to the Negev.

And then in verse 3 it says he went from the Negev to Bethel. To the place between Bethel and Ai. Where his tent had been earlier. And where he had first built an altar.

And there Abraham called on the name of the Lord. So this is. It might seem like some random geography. But the point is to paint this picture of how Abraham went into sin.

[8:21] And then how he repented out of it. And so chapter 12. If you go back and read. It says he started in Bethel. Between Bethel and Ai. And he went to the Negev. And then from the Negev.

He went down into Egypt. And chapter 13 begins with Abraham saying, I'm going back to where I started. And so he leaves Egypt. Goes to the Negev. And then he goes back up to Bethel.

This is a picture of Abraham's faith at work. Of him repenting. So he was in sin in Egypt. Trusting in the wrong things.

Trying to do things in his own way. In his own strength. And God saved him. And Abraham said, I have to start over. I have to begin again. And so back he went. Back to the beginning. Back to where this mess started.

Back to the place where he was worshiping God. And trusting God. So I have a question for you personally. Is it time for you to start over again?

[9:26] To remember where you were. Your first love. The first things that you did. Do you need to do that? Maybe you're sitting there.

And you know there's. There's something not right between you and God. There's the sin. That's unrepented. You're staying in it. You're not getting rid of it.

Your love has grown cold. There's this distance. So you're down in Egypt spiritually. And the first love is gone.

Abraham started over. And you can too. That's what persevering faith does. You sin. You sin. I sin. But faith starts again.

And this is our God too. It's not one strike and you're out. It's not. He's full of compassion for his children.

[10:32] And when they come back to him. Confessing. Repenting. He has mercy on them. He knows that we are dust. He knows our frame. And the amazing thing is.

Is for God's children. Our sin. Our sin. Doesn't call out his scorn. But instead it calls out our pity. He's like a father looking at a child who's sick.

Who's wayward. Who's lost. And he pities us. And he's concerned for us. And so he's calling us back. To the place where we can be blessed. To that place of fellowship with him. He wants us to be close to him. And so we're so slow to believe God's heart. For his children. Because. Just remember. Because of Christ's death. There's nothing. Nothing. Stopping God's. Compassion. From reaching out to you. Even in. [11:28] Your sin. He dealt with your sin. And the death of his son. And so that. Even despite. Your sinfulness. He could reach down. And have mercy on you.

And so in his pity. He says. Come back. Start again. Start again son. Start again daughter. Here I am. Full of love for you. Don't stay away. Isn't that the story of the prodigal son? The son came back. After he had sinned. And wasted all his. His father's money. Open arms. Open hearts. Smiling face. Free love. Put the sandals on him. Put the robe on him. Put the ring on him. We have to celebrate. My son who was. Who was lost. Who was dead. Is now alive again. He's back to me. And that's God's heart. That's Jesus message. [12:24] That's God's heart. To all of his people. To sinners. When they. Come back. To repent. And it's. His heart. Especially for his sons. And daughters. When they are wayward.

And so I ask. Is it time for you. To start again. To begin again. Then come back. God didn't say. Grovel. Abraham. Grovel. Until you're absolutely. Miserable. And then. Maybe. I'll let you. Call on me. Maybe I'll have fellowship. With you. Abraham knew. God's goodness. And his grace. And so he went back to the start. He began again. And the same promise. Is for you. George Whitefield. The Calvinist. Methodist. Of the 18th century. Famous. Evangelist. Used to pray. Lord. Help me to begin.

[13:19] To begin. To be a Christian. Help me to begin. To begin. No matter how advanced. You are in the Christian faith. No matter how long.

You've been. In the Christian faith. That's a prayer. That you need to. Pray. Lord. Help me to begin. To begin. Not where I need to be.

There's areas of my life. That I need to start all over. And. No matter how deep. You are in sin. Or how deep. Your sin is.

No matter how long. You've been in that pit. That's a prayer. That God will honor. If you pray. It's a prayer. That God will answer. For Christ's sake.

God will answer that prayer. And he'll take you out of that slimy pit. And he'll put your feet on the rock. Jesus died. To make you holy. He died.

[14:16] To set you free. From the power of sin. And so when you. Confess. And you repent. And you start again. And you seek. God. God is going to answer.

Those prayers of. Lord. Help me to begin again. Because. This is his will for you. This is why Christ died. To save you from this sin. And so when you pray. Lord.

Save me from this sin. God isn't going to be slow to answer. He's going to give you grace upon grace. And for Christ's sake. He will hear you.

Now. Maybe some of you. Are wondering. If you are saved. If you are saved. You think that maybe God. Has begun.

A work in your life. And maybe you have saving faith. But you aren't. Sure. Well here's a test. Here's a test. Are you.

[15:11] Coming. Back. Do you repent. A Christian is not a man who doesn't sin. If anyone has that idea. That's the wrong idea.

A Christian is not a man who never sins. Who doesn't sin. A Christian is someone who is able. God enables them to repent. To get up. After they've stumbled. Again.

And again. And again. And again. And. The Christian stumbles. But he doesn't stay down. And he might be. Dazed. And confused.

In a sin. For weeks. And days. And weeks. And months. We heard about David. In Sunday school this morning. It just. Oh. A year went by. And. In a sin.

But finally. He comes back. A Christian is someone who. Always starts again. Who after he sinned. He starts again. And. And that's the first thing we see. About persevering faith.

[16:08] Persevering faith. Doesn't produce perfection. It produces a person. Who. After they've sinned. Keeps going back. Starting over again. Now.

Secondly. Persevering faith. Holds out. It starts again. And secondly. It holds out. So. Abraham is back in the land. He's back where he's supposed to be.

And. It doesn't seem like there's been a lot of time. When. Another trial. Hits his faith. He's confronted with another. Test. And.

It's a test that you live with. It's a test that I live with. And it's the test of. Prosperity. Prosperity. So we're living in the land of opportunity.

Uh. We're living in a superpower. And so. In effect. We're living in a Babylon. In a Rome. Uh. Of one of the great empires. That comes and goes.

[17:06] And. But. But that means. That. We have. Comparative. Prosperity. We only feel poor. Because we're only comparing ourselves. To other. Rich people. If we compared ourselves.

To the rest of the world. We would understand. And so this is a test that we face. Abraham and Lot faced it. Abraham survived that test.

Lot didn't. So you remember. And this is talked about in verses 5 through 13. And we're not going to read it all. But you remember what we read.

Lot was with Abraham. Seems like Lot and Abraham have been going everywhere with each other. And their possessions were so great. That they couldn't stay together. The land couldn't support them.

There wasn't enough water. There wasn't enough room. There wasn't enough grass. There wasn't enough space. They needed room to grow. And so. When it's time to build bigger barns.

[18:04] Times are good. And times were good for Abraham and Lot. But. If you remember the parable that Jesus told. When it's time to build bigger barns. It's a dangerous time.

Dangerous time. Time. The Bible says. Teaches us to pray. Give me neither poverty. Nor riches. Why not riches? Because I might disown you and say.

Who is the Lord? Prosperity can make us forget. God. Can make God. In our eyes. Smaller. And unnecessary.

Compared. To riches. And so we think less of him. And money. Becomes. A very attractive. A very attractive savior. It seems like it. It has the answer to everything.

And that's the danger. That Abraham and Lot. Are now faced with. And that's the test. That we live with. So Abraham says to Lot. Let's not quarrel. I think there's lots of good lessons here on peacemaking and that sort of thing.

[19:05] But that's not the point of the passage. He says let's not quarrel. Let's not fight. You choose where you want to go. If you choose the right. I'll go left.

And if you choose the left. I'll go right. So Abraham has this very gracious spirit. And. Now look at verse 10.

Look at verse 10. So the decisions up to Lot. And Lot. It says. Looked up. And saw that the whole plain of the Jordan. Was well watered.

Like the garden of the Lord. Like the land of Egypt. Towards Zor. Zohar. And here's a question. Here's a question.

What. How. Did Lot. Make his decision. What. Did Lot. Use. To make his decision. What faculty.

[19:59] What body part. His. Eyes. His eyes. With his eyes. He looked. And he made up his mind. That was the decisive factor.

What. He. Saw. So the whole plain of the Jordan. Was like the garden of the Lord. It was like the garden of Eden. And if. If you remember. In Genesis 1.

And 2. It talks about. The garden of Eden. Had four rivers running through it. It was very fertile. Very. Lush. And then it was like Egypt. And we talked about Egypt. A few weeks ago. It had the Nile.

But including the Nile. It had miles. And miles. And miles. Of irrigation. And so. It was beautiful. It was fertile. It had lots of.

It had this great promise. For life. It promised life. And it promised happiness. But it was an illusion. A mirage.

[20:56] Sodom looks good now. But in a few days. It's going to be up in smoke. and with his eyes lot saw and he took didn't matter what Sodom and Gomorrah were sinful were wicked he saw and he took does that sound familiar someone else did that in a garden one time but Abraham held out

he didn't go for the land grab he didn't fight with Lot over the promised land he he held out for something better he didn't fight for more he didn't fight for what God had promised he waited for God to give it to him he wasn't going to take this by running over people and said he was looking for for God to give it to him and so in faith he held out for something better now maybe you remember the game show deal or no deal maybe it's still on I'm not sure at the beginning of of the show of the game a contestant is able to choose a briefcase and in the briefcase is you know it's worth a certain amount of money no one knows how much that's worth I suppose except for the the people running the game and as the game goes along the contestant picks out different briefcases and occasionally the banker calls and the banker's this guy up in this foggy glass with you know in this booth hiding behind this foggy glass and he says

I will give you ten thousand dollars for your briefcase and the contestant then has to make a decision whether he's going to take the ten thousand dollars that's promised that's immediate from the banker or is he going to hold out because he doesn't know how much his briefcase is worth now sometimes holding out worked great you know and his briefcase was worth two million dollars or whatever but sometimes you saw the game you know it it didn't always work out the banker would offer him ten thousand dollars and he would hold out and hold out and then turned out his briefcase was worth five bucks it was a game of faith the player was hoping to hold out for just you know to get the best deal but he never really knew he never really knew if he was holding out for something good or not he was just hoping he was now Abraham is holding out too he's saying no to the immediate offer but his faith wasn't in this in a hope or a dream or a wish he was offered the best of the land but instead he gave it to lot he was presented with prosperity and instead he chose to wait for god why and this is important because this this is going to answer the question of why we can wait why didn't Abraham go for the land how could he just walk away from a fabulous offer because he wasn't just waiting for some physical land the the book of Hebrews 11 it says he was longing for a better country a heavenly one see Abraham saw the well-watered plain of the Jordan but behind that he was looking at something that the eyes could not see he was looking for the ultimate thing that God had promised a heavenly country so why didn't Abraham go for the land because he believed the promise his faith was working he was saying it with his eye with his the eye of faith he saw what was really worth holding out for and so the gospel promise held him up and the same promise is what can hold you up brother and sister it's the same promise that meets you and so this whole world is is is mad it's it's insane it's driving after what it can get what it can get more and more and more it's in love with what the flesh sees and what the flesh wants but persevering faith holds out it doesn't go for what the world goes for it waits for something better and brothers and sisters God has promised you everlasting life he's promised us the new heavens and the new earth your homeland your heartland your citizenship is in heaven and Christ is seated there and he is coming back and when he comes back he's going to bring heaven to you he's going to bring everything that his cross won for you an eternity of heaven this God filled heaven all of God for everything that you need he's coming back to make you rich to glorify you with him and so the promise is there God holds it out for you and so will you believe it or will you will you instead live for this world in our family time this week we were covering the story of Esau and Jacob and how Esau sold his birthright

for a bowl of soup stew now a birthright was basically the idea that Esau would receive the majority of of his father's possessions and not just the majority of the father's possessions but he would have the honored place he would become the head of the family and so as the head of the family he would have honor and he would have wealth and so in family time we held an auction and I got the girls and they got their piggy banks and they brought them and they sat down on the couch and I went to the pantry and I got a can of chicken noodle soup and I said all right girls how much will you pay for this chicken noodle soup and we started out with five cents and they're quite willing to pay five cents and ten and I kept going and I got them up to three dollars and but at that point they weren't willing to pay anymore and and when was getting this funny look on her face like you're crazy if you think I'm going to pay that much for a can of chicken noodle soup now we talked about it girls would you trade this house for that can of soup would you trade all the money that mom and dad has for that can of soup and they said no way but Esau did

Esau did and when you live for this world and when you live for what the world thinks and for what you can have and what they think about you and what you drive and how nice your furniture is and how big your retirement is or or or how much prestige you have when you live for the American

dream you are trading the house for the can of soup you're trading that which is supremely valuable for that which is pretty insignificant real faith though weighs things appropriately real faith measures and values things as they are and it holds out and so Jesus is coming and he's coming to make you rich Jesus became poor so that you could become rich and you already are rich in him you have all the treasures in him every spiritual blessing in him so don't go for the land grab that's trading the house for the can of soup that's trading that's what which is supremely valuable for that which is not worth anything it's not worth it and you don't need it brothers or sisters so you don't have to feel at a loss when you see others prospering and you not prospering because you have that which is most valuable you have Christ you have his love for you this deep and wide and long and high this love for you that is beyond measure and it's for you and it's yours and you have his promise you have all of his life all of his righteousness all of his good works for you you have all that he is for you so you don't need it now

Lot looked up and he saw the plain of the Jordan and in a few years the plain of the Jordan would be an ash heap if you want to know how Lot's choice worked out for him you can go to the end of chapter 19 Lot is living in a cave he has nothing and he's lost his wife he has no land he has all of his wealth is just burnt up and God has reserved this world for fire this world for fire and if you choose this world lost person then you'll end up with nothing because what you are choosing is destined for destruction and so the Bible and I myself beg you to raise your eyes higher than that [30 : 58] God offers Christ to you God offers salvation to you God offers himself for you God offers Jesus as your savior and your friend and he says God says I won't be ashamed to be called your God I'll own you you'll call on me and you'll say that's my God and I won't say no it's no I don't know them he'll be our God but he also says you can't be my friend and a friend of this world to be a friend to be a friend of this world is to be an enemy of God but I'm not just talking to unbelievers I'm talking to Christians because judgment is coming it's coming for you and only what you have in Christ will last and so how will the day of judgment find you will you be rewarded for all that you have in him because you held out for God's promise persevering faith holds out for what is the best and it holds out for for all that God has promised in Christ for you and so that's the second thing persevering faith holds out now thirdly and very briefly faith holds on it holds on it keeps running and the last few verses of chapter 13 are so sweet

I think Abraham was feeling a little downhearted at this point in faith he let Lot choose the best of the land but now he's faced with the reality and the result of his of letting Lot do that and so what does Abraham left what does Abraham have well now he has the leftovers and God's promise doesn't seem any closer to being fulfilled and that must have bothered him hope deferred makes the heart sick and I think Abraham was in that place maybe he was saying is this worth it is why am I doing this and that's the reality in every Christian life that's the tension that you should have in your life sometimes you should be asking yourself why am I doing this because I think that shows you that you're making choices and you're living by faith and not living by sight so we're losing our life here to gain everlasting life there's a loss there sometimes I know

I say to myself if this if this isn't true if this isn't true then I am the biggest fool there's ever been if heaven isn't real then I've lived about the stupidest possible life that you could live because I've been saying no I don't want that no I don't want that no I won't take that I won't take that because I want this but if there is no heaven then I've just said no to all that there is didn't Paul say it if the resurrection isn't true then aren't we to be pitied above all men and so I think that's sort of the place where Abraham was at he's feeling that maybe some doubt there about what have I just done or maybe a real sense of loss of uncertainty there Abraham wasn't a superman he was a man like we are and so it was just then that the Lord spoke to Abraham and so I think you can see the grace and the compassion of our Lord here as he comes and he talks to Abraham again lift your eyes lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south and east and west all the land that you see

I will give to you and to your offspring what did Abraham need to hear at that point he needed to hear the promise he needed to hear the first promise again so he needed to hear Abraham it's worth it hold on you have the leftovers now now but you're going to get everything by the end I'm going to do I will do what I have said you want a son I'll give you so many children that you will not be able to count it them they'll be like the dust of the earth and so maybe you've gone to the beach kids this year and you've probably taken your bucket and you filled it up with sand and we'll suppose it's a small bucket now could you count all that sand speck by speck you know I imagine

you could if you took long enough if you had it all dried out you probably could it would take forever but you could do it but how long do you think it would take you to count all the sand on that beach where you're at it would be impossible be impossible and then he's saying the dust of the earth we're not talking about the beach we're not talking about the dunes and you know on Lake Michigan we're not talking about a small teeny tiny beach he's saying the dust of the earth God says you want a son I'll give you so many children you won't be able to count them the stars of the sky the sand on the seashore the dust of the earth that's how many children you'll have what did Abraham need to hear in that moment of discouragement what do you need to hear in the moments of your discouragement you need to hear the promise again God's promise after that God said get up go throughout the land and look it over it's going to be yours start surveying your property and so it doesn't say but I assume that Abraham got up and he looked and he went and at last after that he moved his tents again and he built an altar to the Lord what did Abraham do when confronted with this discouragement and receiving again the promise of

[37 : 26] God he just kept on he held on he kept running saving faith holds on he just kept believing that's what saving faith does it perseveres to the end now learn this one last lesson your faith needs God's promises your faith needs God's promises Abraham's faith needed that renewed promise of God he needed to hear it again he didn't need a new promise he needed to hear the first one again so have you found a powerful promise to live on lately do you know what it is to find that powerful promise that gets you going through a day and a week and then you're still there three weeks from then because the promise is so good have you found a powerful promise lately that life we live is by faith the just shall live by faith faith isn't just the first thing it's not something that we just leave at the door once we become

Christians it's the first and the second and the last it's everything and so have you found a powerful promise to live on lately that's why you need to read your!

that's why you need to make sure that you're reading your Bibles that you're bringing in the Word of God that you're hearing His promises it doesn't matter that you've heard them all before you need to hear them again you need to believe them again and again you don't need to read your Bibles because you need to be a good person or God is going to give you a day if you don't do it you need to read your Bible because that's where the promises of God are found and so you need that gospel again today you need to hear it day by day and so you need to lift up your eyes like Abraham did and look to the east and the west the north and the south look throughout the whole scriptures this is where we find the!

of! God so we need to look through the whole scripture find those promises and live on them don't be a spiritual anorexic someone who just doesn't feed on the word of God but feed on the promises of God and that's what your faith needs that's what you need to keep going to keep holding on to keep persevering to stir up repentance again and again and so we've seen three things tonight persevering faith starts over it holds out and it holds on may God give us that kind of faith let's pray our heavenly father we do ask that you would give us that kind of faith the faith of our father Abraham who when he fell he got up again and he sought you once more started over and he held out for the best he held out for heaven and he held out for all that you had promised him and he just kept on holding on give us that kind of faith you know we're going to be confronted this week with trials and things that shake us and we're going to be challenged with prosperity and Lord we need to have a living and active faith and that comes as a gift from you the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and so we would pray and I would pray for my brothers and sisters here oh Holy Spirit come and stir up faith in us!

[41 : 53] if it's your will we'll die a good death and in any case we'll see you when you come Lord Jesus and that day we won't be ashamed and I pray Lord that you would make it so for your great name sake in Jesus name Amen Amen