

Genesis 26

Could God Ever Use Me?

It's so easy for us to view our own life as insignificant. In fact, we're often very insignificant in our own eyes. We tend to down play the consequence of our place in God's program in the world.

We wonder, "Who am I to even matter to God, let alone have a part in His kingdom. And yet God's work is most often done through ordinary people.

Now, we know that He's used apostles and prophets and kings to accomplish His purposes, but overall God's work in the world has been done by common people with average abilities who have simply been faithful where they were with what they had. God has accomplished most of all through ordinary servants of God.

I have to tell you, it's encouraging to me as I come to Genesis 26 to see that Isaac was an ordinary man. Griffin Thomas said, "Isaac was an ordinary son of a great father and an ordinary father of a great son."

So sandwiched between Abraham and Jacob is Isaac and he spent most of his life in the shadow, of first his father, and then his son. And even though Isaac lived longer than any of the other patriarchs of Israel and forefathers of Jesus, we're told less about him.

Genesis 26 is the only chapter devoted to the life of Isaac. Abraham gets 12 chapters. Jacob gets another 12, and Joseph gets 12 more but Isaac has only this one devoted exclusively to him.

Turn to Genesis 26 page 24

Isaac was an ordinary man. Not a super star by any means. But I believe that in him we can see some important principles for living lives that really matter. We can see some important principles that show that there are no insignificant people with God.

We find the first principle in the first 6 verses of this chapter.

I. God Blesses Obedience

Read verse 1

There are 13 famines mentioned in the Bible. We saw Abraham go through one and now Isaac is in the middle of one. These were people who totally lived off the land. A famine for them could be a death sentence.

Isaac was an ancestor of Jesus. He had great and precious promises from God. Being a believer doesn't exempt a person from disaster, it doesn't prevent trials from coming into our life.

But see, being a God follower and facing trials God's way does give us the opportunity for spiritual growth and to experience God's blessing through trusting in Him.

God has promised all the land of Canaan to Abraham and to his descendants along with great blessings. Now Isaac was in a tough situation. What had been the home of his father Abraham, and his own home for at least 40 years, was devastated by drought.

A famine in the land didn't just mean a water shortage, it meant that people were starving to death.

So Isaac moved out and headed for Egypt. This was the same kind of pressure that his father Abraham had fallen under 100 years before.

God said, "It's your land stay," but suddenly it seemed like the land was forsaken. And not that far to the southwest was Egypt. Egypt wasn't affected by droughts because of the fertile Nile Valley.

And so Isaac moved in that direction. He got as far as Gerar which was in the south part of Canaan.

Then read verse 2 - 6

According to the Genesis record God only made two appearances to Isaac and this was one of them.

God said STOP! Don't follow in the footsteps of your dad who went wrong.

The people of Egypt were descendants of Noah's son Ham and Satan reigned in Egypt. God was going to oppose Satan in this fortress at a later date, through Moses.

But now wasn't the time.

In the Bible Egypt is a picture of this world system and that's where Isaac was headed.

He had hunger pangs, everything was kind of falling apart for him. He was on his way to what looked like the land of plenty. But God in His grace intervened and stopped him from going any farther.

Notice in verse 2 God says, *live in the land of which I shall tell you*, and in verse 3 he says, *Dwell in this land*.

The two Hebrew verbs mean a long-term and a short-term stay. This is like God giving us the human and the divine view of life at the same time.

The verb *shakan* translated "live" means "make your permanent home there."

The verb *gur* translated "dwell" means "stop for a little while before you leave."

It's alright to buy a house and plant shrubbery and a couple of trees. There's nothing wrong with making a permanent home somewhere. Just as long as you look on your house and your furniture and your life and realize that it's all just for a moment. Our citizenship is somewhere else.

God repeats the promises to Isaac that He had made to his father Abraham and Isaac obeys and stops his journey. 5 times in 3 verses, God points to Abraham's obedience to encourage Isaac to trust and obey.

And Isaac was able to get his mind off his immediate situation and on to God's promises and he became directed by God's words.

Isaac learned to order his steps by what God had said and God fulfilled His promise.

Verse 12 tells us...

Remember he was still in Canaan. This famine was probably just tapering off. People around were scratching for food but God enabled Isaac to grow food in abundance.

Obedience to God's Word always brings blessing. Doing what God says puts us in the position to experience God's blessing.

The Bible says that God has already blessed His children us *exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*. (Ephesians 3:20) You say, "Wait a minute, here I am trying to be obedient to God and I'm still just scrapping by."

Those blessings aren't always material. In fact most of them aren't comprised of stuff. Isaac had the promises of the land. His blessings were geared toward the earth, our citizenship is in heaven.

In fact the New Testament tells us this: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*. (Ephesians 1:3)

God has already blessed us. When we disobey what we do is step out of that place of God's blessing. We remove ourselves from what God wants to do in our lives. Obedience brings blessing because it keeps us in that place of spiritual interaction and connection with God.

Obedience might not always be easy. It wasn't easy for Isaac to turn down the promises of Egypt which he could see, for the promises of God which he couldn't see.

Obedience for you might not be easy. To be a godly husband or wife in an unpleasant home, to be submissive and dependent upon God in the face of a major trial, to face a work situation that oppressive is tough stuff. But obedience always opens us up to the power and blessings of God.

David Livingston said, "I would rather be in the heart of darkest Africa in the will of God then sitting on the throne of England out of the will of God."

Man! That ought to be our declaration too.

Obedience might not always be easy, it might not always be pleasant, it might not always seem the most logical thing to do. But it always puts us in the place the greatest spiritual blessings.

Here's the blessing: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. (Galatians 5:22)

Isn't that fantastic? That's what God wants to fill our lives with.

But now as we so often find in the Bible, God shows us a very real and accurate picture of His people. Isaac obeyed God and stayed in faith. But his faith was weak. And in verses 7 - 11 we find Isaac buckling under the pressure of his situation.

I. God Blesses Obedience

II. God Blesses Personal Commitment

Read verse 7

Now instead of repeating Abraham's mistake of running down into Egypt, Isaac repeats Abraham's mistake of lying about his wife. And Isaac didn't even have the excuse of the half-truth his father used.

Remember Sarah was Abraham's half-sister so when he said to Pharaoh, "She's my sister," he at least could say it with some honesty. But Rebekah wasn't Isaac's half sister, she was simply his wife.

Critics of the Bible have had a field day with this passage. Never willing to give the Bible the benefit of the doubt, they say Genesis 26 is just a variation on Abraham's story that got passed along through oral tradition and added here with Isaac's name attached to it.

The thing is, Moses wrote the book of Genesis, it wasn't put together by redactors at a later date.

Just read through the Gospels and you'll see that over and over again Jesus ascribes the first 5 books of the Bible to the authorship of Moses. Moses was fully aware of what happened to his forefathers.

This is God's revelation of the tendency of fallen human nature. I'm sure Isaac knew what his father Abraham had done. I have to believe that Abraham had talked about how God had worked with him and led him in the past even when he failed God.

Now suddenly the pressure is on and in the back of Isaac's mind is the way his father handled a similar situation, and before he knew it he had given the same lie.

Both of these men were willing to endanger their wives to save their own skin. Sarah & Rebekah were exposed to danger when God had chosen them to be mothers in the line of the Messiah.

For a long time the lie was undetected. God very patiently gave Isaac the chance to admit it himself. **But finally... Read verse 8**

I always love KJV here - "*sporting*"

The word *tsachaq* means "caressing," fondling lovingly." This is obviously not something you do with your sister.

Listen to Hebrews 4:13 from the New Testament: *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

Unfortunately not much is hidden from the sight of this world either. When a believer disobeys God there is usually someone watching out their window to see it.

Jesus gave us this command: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16)

The Bible doesn't say, "Do good so everybody will point to you and say, there's a good person." It says, "Do good so that everybody will say that person's God is amazing."

What a tragedy when the people around us can use our actions to blaspheme God instead of praising God. When we get become a roadblock instead of a directional sign.

Abimelech calls Isaac... Read verse 9 - 11

Isaac blew it because of lack of faith. Now Isaac, the man of God, gets called on the carpet by a heathen Philistine.

Abimelech had more insight than Isaac did at this point because he saw the consequences of Isaac's lie.

Sin affects everyone around us. Abimilech says, "You might have caused one of my

people to commit adultery.” Adultery was something that was outlawed by the Philistines.

Do you claim to be a believer in Jesus? As people of God our life and our lips have to match up. We can be sure our sin will find us out.

Whatever chance of bringing God’s truth to these Philistine people who would later cause Israel so much trouble was totally blown at this point.

God had just told Isaac “I will be with you.” God's name through the centuries was the God of “Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.” Isaac was a believer in Jehovah.

If you'd sit down with him in his tent, Isaac would tell you all about his God.

But when the time came to put his faith in God to the test, he failed. And he literally destroyed any hope of any witness and testimony because of his sin.

Your life and what you believe are inseparable. And God is only going to use you to the degree that your walk matches your talk, that your life matches what you have to say.

The people around us are watching us. And they have a right to expect something different out of us. I'll guarantee it, if you live a life of peace and joy and contentment and morality you'll stand out like a flood light in a night with no moon.

People will be drawn to your God because they will see what God is able to do in your life.

Isaac, I believe, learned from this unfortunate situation and once again God blessed him. But there is more trouble on the horizon.

I. God Blesses Obedience

II. God Blesses Personal Commitment

III. God Blesses Meekness

Read verses 13 - 20

In the Middle East in Bible times, all the desert areas were commonly looked at as kind of open areas. Anyone who could irrigate them and get crops

or grass for cattle and sheep was automatically the owner.

To give a name to a well was a recognized way of publicly advertising ownership of an area. To stop up, or destroy, a well was a serious act. In a land where water was at a premium, it was considered an act of war. It was a deliberate encroachment on the territorial rights of another.

So what's Isaac going to do? Abimelech realizes that this strife is going to end up in a full fledged battle so he sends Isaac away. Isaac doesn't stomp his feet, call his lawyer, or get out an assault rifle. He goes quietly

He moves up the valley a short way, digs a new well and the Philistines say "it is ours." Isaac names that well Esek, which means "quarrel" or "contention" and he quietly moves again.

Read verse 21

The very same chain of events takes place. Again the Philistines say it belongs to them. Isaac calls this well Sitneh which means "enmity" or "hostility" and quietly pulls up his tent pegs and moves one more time.

Read Verse 22

This time he is so far from Gerar that the Philistines don't bother him. So he calls this well "Rehoboth" (from the verb *rachab* "to grow wide") or "spaciousness" for, he says, *For now the LORD has made room for us.*

In time Isaac moves again and returns to Beersheba.

Read verse 23 - 24

This is the second of the two recorded appearances of God to Isaac. The first was to give Him a warning. The second is to commend him for the way he dealt with the Philistines. Isaac was innocent, he was being taken advantage of and abused. His rights were being violated.

But Isaac didn't retaliate. He met the situation with meekness, not weakness. He didn't move because he was afraid. Abimelech had already said, *You are mightier than we are.* He dealt with the challenges of life in meekness.

We tend to think of meekness as cowardliness, as being afraid and weak. Actually it's just the opposite. Numbers 12:3 says *Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.*

Moses led over a million people through the wilderness. He got the commandments from God. Exodus 20 says, *Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."*

Moses wasn't afraid at all to go into the presence of God. He was meek, but he wasn't weak. I read a great definition of the word "meekness." it said, "Meekness is strength held in restraint."

Anybody can fly off the handle. Anybody can pick a fight. It takes a strong person to hold restrain themselves in meekness. Isaac was meek.

Innocent suffering met with meekness is always blessed by God.

Isaac's suffering was innocent, and he faced his situation with restraint and generosity and humility. Ultimately that meekness brings God's approval.

Listen to the Bible in I Peter 2:19-21

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

That was the kind of man Isaac was. A man who put into practice Romans 12:18 *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

We live in a day when its all about our rights. When people are so self-focused that we call this the "me" generation.

God has called us to meekness. And as Peter says we have our great example in Jesus Christ. Jesus wasn't weak. He had the capacity to destroy this world in an instant.

But he held this strength in restraint and gave himself for us. Meet unfair situations with meekness, and God has promised His blessing in your life.

Well God's appearance prompts an immediate response from Isaac.

Read verse 25

Isaac at this point really understood God's blessing and his grace. This is the only time it's mentioned that he built an altar. And now, finally, Isaac was really resting in God's promises.

I. God Blesses Obedience

II. God Blesses Personal Commitment

III. God Blesses Meekness

IV. God Blesses Forgiveness

Read verse 26 - 33

While the well digging was underway at Beersheba, a delegate of the Philistines appears. This time it was no less and Abimelech and the chief captain of his army.

Isaac was a wealthy, powerful man now. God had blessed him and at this point he probably could have given the Philistine army a run for their money.

They had pushed him out of their land. They said now "We have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace."

They were obviously worried about what Isaac might finally do. He'd been pushed and pushed and pushed from one parcel of land to the next. They opposed him every step of the way.

What does Isaac choose to do? He could have told them to hit the road. He could have said I'll deal with you later.

But he made a feast, swore an oath and they departed in peace. Isaac forgave these men that had treated him so wrongly.

And notice verse 32, *It came to pass that same day...* (that's the same day that Isaac made peace and forgave his enemies) that same day his servants came to tell him

about the well that they were digging and how they had struck water.

Obviously the concept of forgiveness is rooted in God's treatment of us. From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden God provided a way of forgiveness. All of the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremony that dealt with forgiveness culminated in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament Apostle, Paul, stood up in the synagogue at Antioch and said, *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* Acts 13:38

And see, out of that forgiveness that we have through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, comes our command to forgive others.

Jesus could pray for the very people who crucified him, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.* Luke 23:34

Turn with me to Ephesians 4:32, page 1040

This is one of the clearest, most direct commands in the Bible.

Read verse 32

Over my 30+ years in ministry I've found that this is the top 2 questions people have.

Number one, how am I forgiven of my sins? We're forgiven of our sins as we place our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. And number 2, what does it mean to forgive others and how do I do it?

Listen to this carefully, it will set you free. Forgiveness doesn't depend on the worthiness of the person who offended us. It isn't something they earn or deserve.

Forgiveness is a command of God. We do it as a step of obedience to Him. And God always blesses that obedience.

Forgiveness is an act of the will. It's a promise. A promise not to bring that thing that was done to us up again. Not to the one who wronged us. Not to other people. And sometimes most importantly of all, not to our self.

We don't toy with it and mull it over in our minds but we consciously put it aside.

That is the way God forgives us. He doesn't forget that our sins happened. He can't, or he wouldn't be God. God by His very nature is omniscient.

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12

For You have cast all my sins behind Your back. Isaiah 38:17

God can't forget our sins happened but He can choose not to bring them up again.

Actually, if you think about it, Isaac was a pretty ordinary guy. Over all, in the working of God, he made a very small impact.

Multitudes didn't directly believe in Jehovah because of Him. He didn't do the miraculous. We're hardly told anything about his spiritual life.

And yet through him we learn some very important principles for every day ordinary believers.

God isn't calling us all to be super stars when it comes to spiritual things. But he is calling us all to be faithful.

I. God Blesses Obedience

II. God Blesses Personal Commitment

III. God Blesses Meekness

IV. God Blesses Forgiveness

Isaac might have been an ordinary man but when you really stop and think about it those are some very extraordinary character traits.

Have you removed yourself from the place of God's blessing this morning, or are you standing firm in the midst of it?

You may be just an ordinary believer but God is calling you to live an extraordinary life. One that will count for all eternity.