

Welcome. Good morning. Good morning, on a rainy Sunday morning. Thanks for joining us. My name is George Davis. Great to see you here, or thanks for joining us online. We're continuing our journey through the life of Abraham. So I'm going to ask you if you would, join me in turning to Genesis, chapter twelve. Thanks, Karen. And by the way, as you do that, I wanted just to give you a quick update.

As some of you know, we had a group from our church that recently had the opportunity to visit Israel. And here's a picture of that group on the Mount of Olives looking over that kind of iconic view of the skyline of Jerusalem. And just want you to know we had a great trip. I know some of you were praying for us. I want to thank you for that, really meaningful trip. Things went according to plan, there were no major complications. So thanks for your prayers. And over the last few days, I've gotten a couple of questions that I thought I just wanted to answer for you in case you had the same questions. One of the questions is this, George, when are you going to do it again? And I would simply say I'm very open to doing that at some point in the near future. But it would be helpful if you would actually be interested in going at some point if you would just kind of drop me an email. Hey, if you're thinking about planning something over the next couple of years, I'd just love to be a part of that conversation. So if you have interest, please let me know because it helps in thinking about going back to know who might be interested. So I wanted to mention that. So just let me know if that you have an interest.

Secondly, I've had people say, hey, when are you going to show some pictures? So I'll show a few pictures this morning, but my goal this week is to maybe just record a shorter video highlighting four sites. And with each of these sites kind of helping you understand how the history, the geography, and even the archaeology of the land really helps us understand the Bible. So I want to try to do that this week and we'll post that in case you're interested. As I mentioned, I'll show you just some pictures from one of the places we visited. It was the first place we visited. It's a place called Cesarea, sometimes referred to as Cesarea Maritima or Cesarea by the Sea. Here's an artist reconstruction of that site of the city. And when you think about Caesarea from the Bible, one of the things that comes to mind, remember Peter has the vision that he needs to kind of engage Cornelius and he's invited to Caesarea to tell the good news of Jesus Christ to Cornelius, a Roman military officer. And this really becomes the first point at which the message of Christ moves beyond Jewish circles into Gentile circles. Now, this is an artist's reconstruction of what that city would have looked like. It was built by Herod the Great. And what you need to know, Herod built this city kind of to be the gateway to his empire. There's good historical evidence that in so many ways, Herod was a deeply insecure man. And one of the ways he overcame that was through big building projects. And Cesarea was one of his great accomplishments. This is how he wanted to introduce himself to the rest of the Roman world, so that when people from other parts of the Empire visited, they understood this may be a small part of the Empire, but it is in no way inferior. So this city was built with all the amenities that the Roman elite would expect. It had a theater, it had a hippodrome for chariot races, and, of course, it had pagan Roman temples. It was as Roman as you could be in the land of Israel. Here's the theater which you can now visit. And here's our group, tired after an overnight flight. It was our first stop visiting that theater. To give you just a little more of a taste of the city, let me show you this drone footage. So this is flying over the hippodrome. So

that would have been where the horse races were kept and the ruins kind of to the right, at the top of the screen would have been the ruins of Herod's palace. He built his palace right on the water. And of course, since this was built as a Roman city, it was also the location where the Roman governors lived. In fact, the most interesting find, I think, in Caesarea was this inscription that actually makes reference to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Now, when you and I think about cities in the time of Jesus and the time of New Testament cities in Israel, I'm sure the first city that comes to mind is Jerusalem, because so much of the New Testament kind of hinges on Jerusalem. But you need to understand that at the time of Jesus, at the time of the New Testament, by far the largest and the most powerful city in the land of Israel was not Jerusalem. It was this city. It was Caesarea. This was the center of the economic engine of that community. This was where all the trade with other parts of the Empire would come in and go out, and this was where the Roman leadership was based. So with that in mind, think once again about the experience of Peter, right? He has this vision, and there are these people that come knocking at his door. We want you to come, and we want you to explain the message of Jesus to this guy named Cornelius in Caesarea.

For Peter, this wasn't simply a matter of walking from one city to another city. This was a matter of going to the place, the place that represented, encapsulated everything that was wrong with your country. This was walking into the heart of enemy territory from a Jewish perspective. I mean, if you're, if you're a Star Wars fan, this is like going to the Death Star. If you're a Hunger Games fan, this is like going to the Capitol. And yet that's exactly what Peter did. He was willing to take on that risk, that discomfort. And I think it's quite possible this was the first time he ever went to Caesarea. He was willing to take all of that on for the sake of the mission, for the sake of being obedient to this bigger story of the gospel. And I think there's much for us to learn there. When we think about the place where this story happened, it reminds us that following Jesus will always entail risk, at times discomfort, at times awkward situations. But that's part of living out the story of Jesus.

Now, even as that was true in Peter's life, we see that centuries before in the story of Abraham. And this now brings us back to Genesis 12. Right at the beginning of Genesis 12, Abraham, kind of this aging guy without kids in Mesopotamia, gets this dramatic message from God. I'm going to bless the world through you, right? I'm going to make you into a great nation. You're going to be a source of blessing to every corner of the earth. That's my promise to you, Abraham. But for you to lean into this promise, for you to live into this promise, you're going to have to leave. You're going to have to leave everything that's familiar, everything that is known to you. You're going to have to leave your family, your people, your country. And yet Abraham trusts God, and he does that. They pointed out kind of what that looked like last week. And so you get to the beginning part of Genesis 12, and this is like, oh my goodness, we're off on a great adventure with this swashbuckling guy willing to take risks, Abraham. And then it feels like it all comes crashing down by the time we get to the middle of the chapter. Because the guy who is willing to take so much risk then disappoints us in a very profound way.

To show you what I mean, let's kind of pick up the story in the middle of Genesis, chapter 12. And here's what we read, right? I mean, Abraham, right? He heads off to this land unknown. He leaves everything behind. He goes to Canaan. Isn't it great? Look what God is doing. And then this happens. Now, there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, now just imagine this husband and wife conversation. I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, This is his wife. Then they will kill me but will let you live. So, honey, you know what? I just need you to do one thing for me, right? Say you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake, and my life will be spared because of you.

Now, what happened here? How did this guy who was willing to step out in courage, to leave everything behind, end up acting in such a spineless manner, right? How do we go from this act of boldness to this act of profound disappointment? Well, in thinking about this scene this morning, what I want to do is just ask a couple of questions, and let's see what we can glean from this text, what we can learn from this text. And really, the first question, perhaps, is the most natural question is, why? Why does he do this? Why does he go from courageous to cowardly so quickly? And maybe the simple answer is just pressure, right? I mean, he had taken all this risk to go to Canaan, and as is the case in the land of Canaan, from time to time, he then hits famine, and it's like, okay, he's already taken all this risk. Maybe you're ready to settle down a little bit. But then, boom, a new complication. The new complication is famine. And he decides, well, here's how I'm going to deal with that. I'm going to go to Egypt. We don't know the backdrop, we don't know the background, but somehow it seems that Abraham's cultural perception was his life could be in more danger in Egypt, so he has to protect himself. So you've got kind of these different pieces of pressure piling on to one another. The pressure of famine. How do I provide for my family? What does that look like? And then the pressure of a culture where he seems to be more cautious or skittish or fearful, and how do I survive in that? And so the pressure points are starting to build in Abraham's life. And the pressure leads to fear. And this is what happens.

Now before we become too critical of Abraham at this point. I think we need to acknowledge, I think many of us have seen the pattern, this pattern at work before, right? Maybe you've had a friend, a family member, a mentor, and in so many ways, you looked up to this friend. You admired how he or she how they engaged their work. Or maybe you really were appreciative of how they engaged their family if they were married and they had kids. And there were just so many things that you admired about this person. And then their life got complicated, and then they didn't handle it well. And you wondered what happened. That's happened for some of us. I mean, I could take more time and just describe how that how that happened in the life of one of my mentors, and it was kind of disorienting for me. Someone who had been so helpful in the early stages of my role as a pastor and then he makes decisions, his life goes off the rails, and you're like, what happened here? Likewise. Maybe you've done something like that. Maybe there was a season where it just felt like life is just moving. Life is just moving in the same positive direction. All the dimensions of your life were moving well, and things were going great. I mean, people ask you how things were going, and when you said, they're going great,

you really meant it, right? It wasn't just a casual interaction. Things were really going great for your job, for maybe people around you, if you're part of a family. It just felt like things were really going great. And then something happened that you didn't expect. You lost your job, something happened in your family, and all of a sudden, relationships that you thought were going well weren't going so well. And under the pressure, you didn't respond well. In fact, for some of us, we can look back at those kinds of circumstances and maybe even a deep sense of guilt or embarrassment. I just didn't handle that well. Then what happened? It was the pressure. And with that pressure came fear, right? Or think back. Let's just go back a couple of years ago. Let's just think. Remember some of those crazy COVID experiences, right? Remember going online and seeing these viral videos of someone who just goes ballistic on an airplane? Or seems to just get really crazy in a retail store and just goes off, and you're like, what on earth happened? I mean, I remember in that time, you remember that time we had all the protocols. We didn't have the vaccine yet. So you go to stores or different locations, and there would be all the procedures you had to follow. I remember going to the post office, and at the time, due to all the protocols, there were only so many people allowed in the lobby of the post office. And somehow a customer got into an altercation with one of the clerks about this protocol, and it just heated up. And finally the altercation moved outside, and there was the manager, and I'm inside still in line, and you can hear, I mean, they're at the top of their voices. I thought, maybe the police are going to get involved. And of course, I'm standing here going, I just want to mail my package. And you're like, how on earth, how on earth did it come to this? The truth is, we were all under pressure. We all felt the weight. And that pressure kind of led to all sorts of unhealthy responses.

Abraham felt that same kind of pressure. There have been the unexpected famine. And in response, he decides to go to this place where there's food, but he's fearful about how he might be received. And so the little things are adding up. And under the pressure of his experience, this is how he responds. And you see, even though Abraham's situation is very different culturally than anything we would experience, I do think there are ways we see ourselves in this scene. Because here's one thing I think we need to acknowledge as we kind of look at Abraham's experience, we need to acknowledge that under pressure, it's natural to seek control and comfort. And I think in Abraham's case, this is how he was trying to take control back of the situation. Look, if you'll just pretend you're my sister, they're going to treat me well. If you just pretend you're my sister, our stuff's going to be taken care of. We'll get food, we'll get the supplies we need. If you just pretend you're my sister, this is how he is going to regain control after the unforeseen circumstances of this famine. So, yes, he had taken the risk. He'd moved to a new land. But when things got complicated, he's buckling under the pressure and the fear that that pressure fosters. And under pressure, this is how he sought to regain control.

And I think for us, under pressure, we often do the same thing. In some sense, we try to regain control of hard situations. We may do it by trying to micromanage those people around us. We may do it by getting angry constantly at the people around us, or we may even have an opposite effect. Sometimes I think we want control, but we don't know how to get it. So we just kind of become passive. We become indecisive, we withdraw, we disengage. And I think what often happens is if I can't gain control in these pressure-packed situations, then what I want is

comfort. So I may end up binge watching show after show, just kind of losing myself behind a screen may lead to unhealthy behaviors involving alcohol, drugs, pornography. Other ways we just try to escape. Other ways we just try to disengage, to numb the pressure and have some sense of control.

So that leads me to this question. Just take a moment with me and fill in this blank. When I'm under pressure, I blank. Wrestle with that statement for a moment. When I'm under pressure, I blank. Now, for some of us, maybe even many of us, our responses maybe are pretty healthy. When I'm under pressure, I kind of seek to figure out how I can engage a situation well. I get other people involved. I'm part of a group at church. I get people praying for me. Maybe you would say that's what I do when I'm under pressure. But I think for others of us, if we're honest, our responses may be unhealthy. Right? When I'm under pressure, I get angry. When I'm under pressure, I become irritable to everyone around me. When I'm under pressure, I seek to control through my displeasure. When I'm under pressure, I procrastinate just to try to avoid hard things or hard conversations or hard decisions. For some, even when I'm under pressure, I turn to self-harm, cutting. So just wrestle with that statement for a moment. When I'm under pressure, I blank. And even as you think about how you would fill in the blank, let's move to another question, and that question is this, what happened as Abraham did this? And let me just highlight a couple of things that kind of rolled out of Abraham caving under this pressure, giving into this view.

Let me just bullet a couple of things that I think are pretty clear in Abraham's experience. First of all, he becomes very self-focused, doesn't he? Go back to that passage I just read, and it's all about, I need you to do this so that I can be saved, so that my life will be spared. In the midst of this pressure, Abraham kind of turns in a very self-focused direction. And again, that shouldn't surprise us, because I think we've experienced that as well, right? That under pressure, it can be easy just to be consumed with myself. Under pressure all I see around me is my situation, and I lose sight of others. So one of the things that happens to Abraham here is based on how he responds, he becomes very self-focused.

Furthermore, not only does he become self-focused, I think he becomes comfortable with little compromises. He becomes comfortable with little compromises. And here's why I say this. As it turns out, this is not the only time he does this. We continue reading the story of Abraham, and there's so many positive scenes, but we hit another pressure point in Chapter 20, and guess what? He does it again. He moves into an area kind of southern Israel, southern Canaan and the Negev, and there's this king named Abimelech, and he does the same thing again. She's my sister. Now, some have speculated, well, this is just a duplicate copy of the same situation, but I think it's very, it makes sense to realize, no, this happened more than once. Because you and I know that maybe there are some things we only do under pressure, but we've seen that pattern in multiple situations. You and I know at times we can look back at our life and under pressure, here's how I've responded here, and things went well, and then there was another point, and I did the same thing once again. Well, even as that can be true in your life and mine, it was true in Abraham's life. So he hits another crisis point where he feels the pressure, it fuels the fear, and he has the same unhealthy response. I need you to say you're my sister. So it

happens again in Chapter 20. You can read that there. And in that chapter, we get a little more information, because in that chapter Abimelech, this king has a dream, and through the dream, he comes to learn that Sarah is actually married. So he confronts Abraham, and here's the information we get, right? The additional information is this. Abraham says, well, actually, she really is my half-sister. Right. They have the same father but different mother. So technically, what he had said was true. He simply didn't tell the whole story. And under pressure, he just got comfortable with that little compromise. I'm going to shade the truth to my benefit.

Furthermore, not only does he kind of become comfortable with little compromises, we've got to acknowledge his actions complicated the lives of others. Think about what he's doing here. In two different situations he's throwing his wife under the bus. Right. He's putting his wife at extreme risk. And interestingly, in these two scenes, we never hear from her. I think the author is showing us this was all about Abraham. This was all about his path of self-protection. This was all about his self-focus. And not only did he put his wife at risk, he was also setting a bad example for his son. Right. Because the story of Abraham continues. Finally, Isaac is born. The fulfillment of this promise. Yes, we're moving forward in God's plan. But then Isaac becomes an adult, and Isaac finds himself in a pressure situation. And what does he do? He does the exact same thing that his dad did. Look at this. Genesis, chapter 26. When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, she is my sister, because he was afraid to say, she is my wife. He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, his wife, because she is beautiful. And you're like, where on earth did he get that idea? He got it from his dad.

And see, here's one of the tragedies in some of these types of situations. We find ourselves under pressure and sometimes that pressure leads to fear, and we don't handle it in healthy ways. But in the midst of that, it becomes easy just to say, but this is just about me. In fact, sometimes in the midst of it, we even know we're not handling it well. Right? And it's like, well, look, I know I'm putting this off when I need to deal with it, but this is just about me. I know I'm kind of getting angry in ways I shouldn't under this pressure, but I have a right to be angry. And what we lose sight of is the ways in which our behavior is actually impacting the people around us. I mean, maybe I have been more angry lately, but I don't see what that anger is doing to other people. Maybe I have tried to numb the pressure through escapist behavior. And what I don't see is that that behavior is affecting the people around me. So here's what happened to Abraham, right? He's called on this great adventure. He's called on this great, great mission. Yet at times under pressure, he was overwhelmed by fear. And as we work through his life, this is kind of the storyline of his life. This is what God is slowly addressing in the life of Abraham, this underlying fear. And as a result of that fear, he sought to control his situation in unhealthy ways. In doing so, he became self-focused. He became comfortable with little compromises, and he complicated the lives of other people.

So that leads just to one more question this morning. And that question is, well, how do they get back on track? How do we get back on track when we feel stuck, maybe? Furthermore, how do we avoid getting stuck in the first place? How do we avoid getting kind of overwhelmed by that pressure and doing unhealthy things? Well, notice what happens when you go back to Genesis 12. Here's what happens, right? Abraham pretends that Sarah's his sister, and

ultimately she's brought into the household of Pharaoh. I'm not sure Abraham anticipated that. It kind of got to be a complication. And then his household is hit with disease and Pharaoh is not a dumb. And he realizes something's wrong here. And he connects the dots and realize this is at the feet of Abraham. He confronts Abraham, the true story comes out and Pharaoh sends Abraham on his way. He says, you need to get out. I'm done with you. Goodbye. And then we read this. So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, that is kind of the southern desert region of Israel. And he does so with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. And Abraham become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. And from the Negev he goes farther north. 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. And of course, we read about the earlier building of the altar in the first part of chapter 12.

So Abram is kicked out of Egypt and he goes back to Canaan, and in essence, he retraces his steps. He goes back to the place where he built an altar. And it's almost like he's saying, okay, let me go back to the beginning, or maybe more specifically, let me go back to the place where my life got off track and let me pick it up there. So that's where he goes. And if I were just to highlight one thing in this paragraph, it would be this. In a word, how does Abraham get his life back on track? He worships. He worships. He made this courageous move. He'd come into this land. This is going to be the land God is going to give him. And he built an altar but then things got complicated, and he gets off track. He caves into the pressure. So now what does he do? He says, okay, I'm going to go back here. This is what I remember. So let me go back to what I know. Let me go back to what I remember. Let me go back to this place. And this section of the narrative then ends with the idea: and Abram calls on the name of the Lord. And the idea of calling on the name of the Lord, it's more robust than simply bringing your request to God. I think it can be used in that context. But the different ways this phrase can be used communicates the idea of relying on the characteristics and attributes of the Lord, of remembering his goodness and his faithfulness to his promises, remembering that he will finish what he has started.

So Abraham's life gets off track, and so he goes back to this place where, you know, this was where I was calling. This was where I was leaning into the reality of who God is and what he's done and the fact that he will be faithful to his promises. So this is where I'm going. So in a word, his life gets back on track through worship. Likewise for us, I think, when we're under pressure, I don't know if you do this, but sometimes under pressure, under complicated situations, particularly situations that maybe can create a certain level of angst, anxiety, and fear, my first kind of go-to move can be, I got to have a plan, right? How am I going to handle this? How I'm going to respond? What am I going to do next? And all of that. There's wisdom in that because I need some way to respond. Yet I think in looking at the scene, looking at Abram going back to this place of worship, what it reminds me is this, before I need a plan, I need a posture. Before I need a plan, I need a posture. And that posture is worship. See, Abram got under pressure, and he starts making his own plan somehow. It's not that he denied God. It's just he kind of forgot about him. And then so he goes off in his own direction, and that just gets more complicated. So now he says, Look, I got to come back. I got to come back here. I've got

to come back to this place of worship. I've got to come back to the reality of who God is revealing himself to be in my life. And his faithfulness to his promises.

And maybe for some of you here, there's a sense in which you can maybe your life has kind of gotten off track a little bit. Maybe in the midst of the pressure, there are some things you've done you're not really proud about. You could give explanations under pressure we do all sorts of things, and maybe you'd say, I thought it was a wise decision, but it's proven not to be. And somehow your life has gotten off track. And in a real sense, you need to come back to this place. As you seek to engage a complicated situation you don't just need a plan. You need a posture, a posture of worship. Now, I realize in saying that this can be hard, right? When you're under pressure, it's hard to see God's goodness and his faithfulness. And some of us are in situations where it's like, I'm not sure how God can be at work in this. And I get that. Furthermore, for some of us, it's like we've blown it. We know we've made mistakes. We know we've gotten off track. And it's kind of like, I'm not sure how God can make anything positive out of the mistakes that I have made. Well, if that's where you're at, there's one more thing I want you to see in this text, and that is this. I think it's important to understand that the foundational point of this narrative is ultimately not about Abraham. The foundational point of this narrative is about God. And the foundational point of the story is the truth that God is faithful to unfaithful people. In fact, in a real sense, underlying the entire narrative flow of Abraham, his family, and his descendants in Genesis, underlying that entire narrative, is the question, can God really fulfill these promises through broken people? And the answer is yes, he can. Even the mistakes of Abraham, even the reality that this man who can be so courageous at times bows to the strength of cowardice, even that reality will not thwart the fulfillment of God's promises to his people. That was true then. That is true now. So if you're kind of in a place where it's like, I want my life to get back on track, but I'm not sure about worship because I'm just not sure how God can be in this. Let me just remind you of one statement from the apostle Paul, who writes, He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? So how do we get back on track when we've felt the weight of the pressure? How do we get back on track when we felt that weight of pressure that generates angst and fear? We get on track through worship. We get back on track through worship. So would you join me in prayer?

Gracious God, as we have looked at this scene from the life of Abram, first of all, I thank you that the Bible just kind of gives us his character in all dimensions. We see the amazing strength, generosity, courage, and boldness at times in his life, but we also see these really broken moments. We see the reality, the pressure, and the fear that comes with that. And, Father, we can relate to that because at times, we feel pressure. In our own circumstances, we know that fear. And some of us, perhaps, are here, and we're sitting in that right now. So I pray what we would take away from this story is just the reality of who you are. And even as you were faithful then, you are faithful now. You prove yourself faithful even to unfaithful, broken, sinful people. And, Father, may that truth just bring us back to a place of worship. So I pray particularly for those of us who are here, who are joining us online, maybe we've been under the pressure and we've been trying to figure out the next steps. We've been working on the plan, but we've



forgotten the posture that we need. So may this be a moment, a time where we're willing come back to that place of worship. And I pray that in Jesus name, Amen.