

All right, thanks, Nick. And as he said, I'm also Nik, Nik Schatz and excited to open up God's Word and study it with you today. So if you have a Bible hey, thanks, Bob. If you have a Bible, go ahead and open it up to Genesis 15. I like to read the whole text so that you get the whole big picture. And then we'll go through it a little more slowly. If you grab one of the Bibles that's in the pews in front of you, it is page let's see, page nine, so early on. So you can grab that and I will read through the text and then we'll jump in after I find it. All right? Genesis 15.

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. By the way, whenever you're reading scripture and you see the word Lord in all caps, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, that's kind of a code for the personal name for God, the proper name for God: Yahweh. The original translators, out of reverence and respect, didn't want to write out God's name, Yahweh, so they wrote out kind of an abbreviation. So the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision. Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward. But Abram said, Sovereign Lord, what can you give me, since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, you have given me no children, so a servant in my household will be my heir. Then the word of Yahweh, the Lord came to him, this man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir. He took him outside and said, look up at the sky and count the stars, if indeed you can count them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. Abram believed Yahweh, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it. But Abram said, Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it? So the Lord said to him, bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon. So Abram brought all these things. He cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. Verse twelve. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. And then Yahweh said to him, "Know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go on to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day, Yahweh made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites. This is the word of God for the people of God. Praise be to God.

So there's a lot going on in that text. So before we jump into it, let me start off with just a story. So my wife and I, a few years ago, moved here from North Texas. We were living in Dallas, Texas, when we had both of our children. And in North Texas, it's warm almost all year round. So we had this daily routine. Sometimes twice a day, we would go to the playground with our children. Now, up here, I know winter lasts like six, seven months. In North Texas, winter lasted maybe two, maybe 3 hours, and it was over. So it was almost always nice. So we would go to

the playground every single day, sometimes multiple times a day. And of course, my kids, they were like two and four at the time, their favorite part of the playground was the slide. Who doesn't love a slide, right? They love going on the slide. Well, something you need to know about playgrounds in North Texas, especially if you were raised in Pennsylvania or if you grew up up north, up in this area, this has probably never occurred to you, but in North Texas, the equipment gets hot. I mean, I know you guys around here, oh, it's 78. It's so hot. You don't understand. It gets actually hot, really hot. Like first degree burn hot on this equipment minute. And so all the parents know, if you go to the playground with the kids, you got to go early in the morning or you go late in the evening when the sun has set and it's cooled off, there's more shade. Well, one day my wife and I did not follow our own advice, and we went to the playground at the heat of the day. You can see where this story is going, especially given the picture. So we showed up at the playground, and you know how kids are. They don't know if it's hot or cold. You go to the beach; the water is freezing. They don't care. They don't care about the temperature of anything, they touch hot stoves, whatever. So they run on the playground equipment, and before we can say anything, they run to their favorite piece of equipment. They jolt up – well, I mean, they're like three so they hobbled up the stairs, up to the top of the slide, and they begin to go down the slide. And they're wearing shorts, and the tender part of your leg right there just goes across that hot, scorching, hot metal. And I will never forget the shrieks of pain, the squeals, the weeping and gnashing of teeth that was heard at that place. And we were the only people there. Nobody else was crazy enough to be there, so nobody thought there was child abuse going on. But they were screaming, man. They were screaming. And so my wife and I, we just play zone defense. We each grab one kid, and we're holding them, trying to console them. We hadn't thought about the slide. We didn't think about it. And so we're checking on the leg. Oh, it looks like you'll be okay. And they're crying. After several minutes of them weeping, eventually they calm down, and they mustered up the courage to go back and go back to playing for a few minutes. But there is one thing they did not play on - the slide. Man, they were going nowhere near that slide. They didn't want to touch that slide at all. What I learned is that after several months of time, they still wanted nothing to do with the slide, okay? We would go to the playground every day, and they would do the swings, the seesaw. They would do everything, the monkey bars. But they wanted nothing to do with the slide. And, I mean, time went on. It was even early fall was coming on. It was starting to get a little more brisk outside. We were wearing jeans at this point. And we'd go to playgrounds with shade, and I would go up kids, the slide. Don't you remember the slide's fun? Don't you remember the slide? No. Burn me once, man. I'm not doing that. I would rub my hand on the slide. It's not hot. It's fine. I would go down the slide. I would offer to go down the slide with them. I tried to be logical. You're wearing jeans. It's like 70 out here. It's not 100 anymore. I mean, I was trying to, it's okay? But they had their doubts. They wanted nothing to do with the slide. Well, one day, just at random, we were at a playground. I wasn't actively playing with the kids. I was off to the side, sitting and just watching them play. And I saw my kids running around, and they paused, and for a brief moment, they looked at the slide, and I could tell there was a memory. I think there were two competing memories. There was a memory of, oh, the slide's fun. But I got burned one time. I could tell there was a brief moment where the angel and the devil were on their shoulders, and there was a conversation going on. And then I saw my kids, one at a time, they very gingerly, they didn't rush up the stairs, but they gingerly walked over. And they crept

up the stairs, and they got to the top, and they looked down, and they looked down that slide. And I could tell they were processing, should I trust it? Should I, don't know. I have my doubts. Should I trust it? And here's what they did. They bent over and did that, and then they tapped it again. They tapped on the slide, and that gave them enough faith to go down. And they were grinning. They were giggling. They remembered the memories of the slide, that they had a great time with the slide. They got to the bottom. They were giggling. They were cackling, each one at a time. And then they both ran back up the steps, and they got to the top. And here's what they did. They tapped it again. Hey, I don't know, man. I don't trust these things. I've been burned once. Maybe it heated up while I was down there giggling. I mean, I don't know. So they tapped it, and every time they did the slide, they would tap on that slide before they went down. Funny story.

My wife and I, we move up here to Pennsylvania five, six years ago, and we're at Cocoa Castle. My wife told me that the kids were up there and they would go up to a slide, and they tap on it. And all the parents around here are like, what's going on? Someone asked my wife, what's up with your kids? Why are they tapping on the slide? You don't understand. You Pennsylvanians, you don't understand, right? They were tapping on the slide. My kids wanted so bad to believe that the slide was safe, that the slide was fun. But because of past experiences, they had their doubts. As their father, I am so glad that after that experience, they didn't give up on slides completely just because of that experience. I'm so glad they didn't just leave the playground and say, I'm done playing at this place because of my doubts. I'm so glad they had just enough faith to climb the ladder and at least tap on the slide.

And so here's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to talk about faith and doubt. And we're going to read a story well, we just read it, about a man named Abram who had at least twice in this text he has serious doubts about God and about what God was telling him. And here's what we're going to learn. Everything I'm going to say today can be boiled down to just two sentences. So if you tune out the rest of the time, that's okay. Just remember these two sentences. Everything I'm going to say today can be boiled down to this thing right here. Okay, ready? When it comes to faith, all of us move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if you need to tap the slide. When it comes to faith, all of us move in and out of doubt, and it's okay if you need to tap the slide. I'm convinced that there's three kinds of people in this room or watching online. There's three kinds of doubters. Okay? I believe that there are some no doubters, some occasional doubters, and some frequent doubters.

So there's a couple of you in here that you don't have any doubts about your faith. You would say, there's not a trace of doubt in my mind. There's not a shadow of doubt in my mind. I am fully 110% convinced that God is real, that what happened in this book, in the Bible, is true, that Jesus was a real man who died for my sin. He rose from the dead. There's a heaven. There's a hell. I'm going to heaven. There's not a trace of doubt in my mind. That there are some of you in here that you don't have any doubts. Here's what I want you to hear today. Don't laugh at the other kids when they tap on the slide. Don't pick on the other kids when they tap on the slide because you are in the minority. There might be three of you. I doubt there's even three of you, but there might be, like, two or three of you who have no doubts about your faith. But

don't laugh at the other kids when they tap on the slide. And what I want you to be paying attention to as we read through this text again is how Yahweh, how God, responds to Abram. He doesn't laugh at him. He doesn't dismiss his doubts. He doesn't reprimand him. How dare you waver in your faith? He doesn't do that. He is gracious. He's patient. He's gentle with Abram. He works through the doubt with him. So I want you to pay attention to that. Okay? There's a couple of you, maybe, that are no doubters.

The second category, I think the biggest category, is occasional doubters. Okay? So I'm in this category, and there's many of you in here. There's many of you online that are watching that you're an occasional doubter with me. Okay? If I were to ask you, do you believe the Bible is true? Yes, most of the time. Do you believe that God is real? Yes, most of the time. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit lives within you and is empowering you to do his will? Usually. Do you believe that God's going to meet all of your needs and provide for you as you do his will? You know that one's a work in progress. I believe it up here. I don't believe it here. No. A lot of us are occasional doubters. A lot of us. When it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt. I'll give you an example of this. So do I believe that the Bible is true, that the events that happen and are recorded in here are true? Yes, I do. Sometimes when I read them, I wonder. Right now I'm reading through the Hebrew Bible, or also known as the Old Testament. It's about two thirds that was written before the time of Jesus by the Hebrews, by the Jews. So I'm reading through that, and I just finished up reading first and second Kings. Here's an example, and there's some prophets in there that do some pretty miraculous things. There's Elijah and then Elisha, who comes after him, and they do some miraculous things. Do I believe that those things actually happened? Yes. But man, when I read them sometimes I think, is there a hyperbole going on here? I don't know. Is this mythological? Because a chariot of fire and I mean, I don't know. Does this stuff really happen? I believe it, but I read it, and I really? We all go through moments of doubt when it comes to faith. We all move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if you need to tap on the slide. Here's what I want you to hear today. If you're an occasional doubter with me, it's okay if you have to tap on the slide every now and then. Now, here's what you cannot do if you have occasional doubts, don't just push those things to the back of your head. No, I'm going to live in faith. I'm not going to think about those things. I'm going to not have the spirit of doubt. I'm just going to be a person of faith. I'm going to push those things to the back of my head, because here's what's going to happen. Someday you're going to have a moment of crisis. You're going to have a crisis of your faith. You're going to go off to college, and there's going to be that professor that questions everything you believe. You're going to have a loss in your family. You're going to go through some kind of crisis of faith, and all of those doubts that you've pushed to the back of your mind are going to come to the forefront. They're going to stick their finger at you and say, I demand an answer. And you're not going to be at a place where you can answer them, and you're going to leave the playground. You're going to be done with the slide because you aren't at a place where you can logically and realistically think about the reasonableness of the Christian faith. You're not going to be at a place and you're going to leave the playground. Don't push the doubts to the back of your mind. When a doubt comes to your mind, you need to process that. Think about it. Think logically about it. Talk to yourself. Talk to God about it. Even if you're not sure that your prayers are even going anywhere. Talk to him, journal about it. Talk to your pastor, talk to someone and process these doubts. Think

about what is the alternative? If this isn't true, then that means this is true. Or just think about it, process those doubts, and then maybe you'll be prepared in the future when that moment of crisis comes.

Let me lastly talk about the frequent doubters. I believe there are some in this room, watching online. Maybe you're picking up the podcast. Somebody texted you, hey, you should listen to this podcast and you're listening to this recording later. You're a frequent doubter. Maybe you're a teenager and you grew up in church. You've been coming to church for a while and you haven't quite had the heart to tell your parents that I just don't believe that. I know you raised me in church. I don't know if I believe this stuff. You haven't had the heart to tell your parents yet. Maybe you're coming here with your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your husband, your wife, and you're kind of going along, but you haven't had the heart to tell them, look, this church stuff just isn't my jam. I just don't believe it. Maybe you're on the verge of walking away. You've been a believer, you want to believe so bad. But I don't feel God, this book, you're just not feeling it, and you're on the verge of walking away. Here's what I want you to hear before you walk away. Don't leave the playground quite yet, and here's why. I've been through seasons of doubt. I'll share a little bit about that. What I have come to discover is that if you leave this playground, I'm talking about Christianity, that's the metaphor, if you leave Christianity because of your doubt, what I have discovered is that there are bigger slides out in the wild. There are bigger slides out in the wild. It is hard to believe that this book is true and that there's a real God who's a personal God, who wants to communicate with me, who wants a relationship with me, that there's a heaven someday and a hell someday. It's hard to believe that. But in my opinion, it is harder to believe that you and I are sitting on some rock, zipping or spinning around, and we don't even feel ourselves spinning, but we're just spinning on this rock in the middle of outer space, and we're going around the sun once a year, and we're just floating around in this vast universe. We don't know how we got here. We don't know why we're here. There's no purpose. You and I are just a lump of carbon that's just kind of walking around the planet. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if I love my kids or beat them. I mean, what is the purpose of all this? I find that much harder to believe than this. So don't leave the playground yet, because there's always something to doubt. There's bigger slides out there. Don't leave the playground quite yet. And I'll come back to you at the end of this message. But once again, when it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if you need to tap on the slide, okay?

I've spent the first half of the message telling you what I'm going to tell you. Now let me actually tell you. Let's actually get into it. So today we're going to talk about a man named Abram. He is known as a man of unwavering faith. Okay? The three of the world's major religions look to this guy as a man of faith, right? Here's a picture of him from Time magazine. Obviously, he lived thousands of years ago, so it's just a sketch of him. But we look back at him as a man of faith. But what we're going to read in this story, what we saw in the story, as I read earlier, is that Abram was someone who moved in and out of doubts. And the only reason that we know his name and that Christianity as we know it today exists is because he had just enough faith to bend over and tap on the slide. He had enough faith to climb the ladder and at least explore his doubts. When it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt. So let's look

at how Abram tapped on the slide. Okay, let's go back to Genesis, chapter 15 and start with verse number one. After this, the word of the Lord or Yahweh came to Abram in a vision. Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward. Let me pause for a second. This is not the first time that God has communicated or spoken to Abram in some kind of vision. If you've been with us for the last couple of weeks, you remember hearing about early promises that God had given to Abram, okay, known as the Abrahamic Covenant. There's three big promises that God had promised Abram. Number one is that he was going to have many children. And by many children, I mean his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. His family line would be so large and so great, he would have so many children and grandchildren that there would be enough people to form an entire nation after his name. The second big promise that God gave Abram was that he was going to grant this big family that's later renamed Israel a land. There was going to be a land, a place for them to call their own and to form their own nation. The third promise is that Abram and his family, this nation that's later renamed Israel and has a land, would be a blessing to all the world. And you and I look back and we know that blessing was that Jesus Christ the Messiah was born out of Abram's family and died to pay the penalty for the sins of the entire world, including ours. So we know that this actually happened, that this blessing was the Messiah who died for the sins of mankind. And so he's reminding him of these promises. I'm your great reward. And here's what Abram says some time has passed since that original promise, and Abram said in verse two, sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus. In other words, here's what Abram's saying lord, I want to believe that these promises you gave me are true. However, I'm 75 years old. My wife is long past childbearing days. I mean, it doesn't take an OB doc to tell you this isn't going to happen. The only way I can think of you fulfilling this promise that you've given me is if I were to adopt one of the servants in my household, this Eliezer guy. And you can accomplish your promise, if possible, through him. But I don't see how this is going to happen. Okay? He has his doubts about his faith. What I want you to notice is that Abram doesn't push his doubts to the back of his head. He had a vision. It could have been easy for him to wake up and say, well, that was a weird dream. I've got farming to do. Then move on and not think about it. No, he talks back. He might not even be sure that God's listening, but he talks back. He's trying to tap on the slide and respond to these doubts.

Here, I want to read you something from Tim Keller's book. This is called the reason of God. Here's a quote from his book: A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy, or too indifferent, to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection." Don't just push your doubts to the back of your mind, because there's going to come a day when you have a crisis faith and all those doubts are going to come to the front and demand answers. And you're not going to be at a place where you can give any answers. And you're going to just leave the playground without having seriously thought through your doubts. When it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt, and it's okay if we have to tap on the slide.

I can share several examples in my life. I went through two major seasons of doubt. I only have time to tell you one. But when I was a teenager, when I was 17 years old, I became a Christian. That's when I pledged my allegiance to Jesus and I believe in you, I'm going to follow you with my life. That's when I became a Christian. When I was about 17. Most people were very supportive of me. They were happy for me. Congratulations. That's great. Nik there was one person who at least one person who was not supportive, and that was my dad. My dad was an atheist. And so even before I became a Christian, but especially afterwards, he would just drip seeds of doubt on me. I mean, he was extremely intelligent. He had like five master's degrees because he just enjoyed school and he was like super smart. I could never disagree with him. He would win if we had some kind of argument or disagreement. But hey, you really believe this stuff? I mean, you're a smart kid. I mean, come on, you really believe this stuff? There's a heaven? Come on. He would really push those questions into my head. And so at a young age, I was forced to wrestle through these doubts. And my dad would ask me questions that I didn't have answers to. I still don't have answers to them and I wouldn't know how to answer those questions. Looking back, I'm really glad that I had to go through that experience of constantly, month after month - my parents were divorced, so I would go once a month or so to visit him. And month after month, I'm glad that I had that experience of having to hear a doubt and I'm glad I didn't push them aside. I'm glad I didn't walk away from the slide. I'm glad that I was forced to ruminate and to think on it. And I did some journaling on it and I did some praying on it. I went and I talked to my pastor about it and I gave serious thought to this stuff. And I've walked away from that now more convinced than ever because I had to go through the doubt and really think through it and logically process my doubt. I believe my faith is much stronger now because of that. It's normal to have doubts. And so if you're listening, if you're watching online, if you're on the podcast right now, if you have doubts about the existence of God, about the word of God that we have, about a promise of God, about a calling that you believe God has called you to, and you're questioning all that, it's normal to have doubts. And it's okay if you need to tap on the slide, it's okay. In fact, I would encourage you to do so.

So let's look at how Yahweh, how God, replies to him. Look at verse number four. The word of the Lord came to Abram this man, this Eliezer that you mentioned. This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir. And he took him outside and said, look up at the sky and count the stars. If indeed you can count them, so shall your offspring be. Now pause for a moment. This is not how I would expect God to answer a doubter. I mean, if this is the first time I'm reading the story, I would expect God to say, how dare you question me? I'm the God of the universe and you're a peon. How dare you, he doesn't respond that way. Abrams, come outside. Come look at the stars. What are those things anyway? From here, it looks like this. What are these things? I made all these. Look, if you can even count the stars, this is how big your family is going to be someday. He gently and graciously and patiently works through this doubt with Abram. He doesn't reprimand him or make fun at him for tapping on the slide. And I hope that we can be a church family that embraces people that have doubts and that welcome people that just have a hard time believing this stuff. I hope this can be a place like that. Verse six. Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it, that's a hard one to say, he credited it to him as righteousness.

God is saying, look, if you can have just enough faith to climb the ladder, if you can have just enough faith to believe in me, I can work out my plan through you. That's what he says. So Abram looks at the stars, he believes God, and that's the end of his doubt. He never doubts again, right? Well, not true. That's not true of any of us, right? We all move in and out of doubt, and Abram is a man just like you and I. He's just like us. Look at verse seven. So Yahweh, the Lord also says to him, I am the Lord. He speaks to him again. Who brought you up out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land, to take possession of it. In other words, God is telling Abram, look, you're going to have this family. I just told you and you and your family, you're going to take the land of Canaan, you're going to take possession of it. Now, I just want to pause. I just want to time out for a second and help you. What's Canaan, what does this take possession of a land? What does that even mean? Let me just try to give you a modern example, okay? I want you to imagine, Paul, I want you to imagine that you're 75 years old, and I'm sorry, your wife is around 75 as well, okay? Suzanne, so you guys are 75 years old. I want you to imagine you're 75 years old. You have a small business with like, 200 employees, okay? So they had servants and stuff that took care of their livestock. So you have a small business. You're 75 years old, you have no kids. You have a small business of 200 people, and you receive a dream or a vision from God. And God tells you, I am taking you out of the land of Pennsylvania and giving you the land of Texas to take possession of it. I mean, that's the equivalent of - what the land of Texas? Like, with all the gun lovers and they love immigrants there, right? And all the ranchers and I'm not making any political statements. I'm just trying to paint a picture. This is kind of what's happening. You and your 75-year-old spouse and your little small business, you're going to take over the land of Texas. There's people that live here, right? And the Canaanites were known as savage, ruthless, bloodthirsty, barbaric people. I mean, you ever read through the Old Testament laws, the Hebrew laws, and you're like, why is there a law about that? Why did God put these weird there's, like, weird sexual commands in there, and there's commands like, whatever you do, don't throw your babies into a fire pit. I mean, why is there a law? Because the Canaanites did that stuff. These guys were crazy. They were ruthless. They were barbaric, they were savages. Just for fun, they would go out and raid and burn villages and kill people. These were savage people. And you and your 75-year-old self is going to go take your walk and stay. You're going to take over the land. Here's how Abram responds. This is unreal, verse eight. Abram says, sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it? If you translate the Hebrew literally, it means what? I'm really glad that verse eight is in there because it reminds me that Abram's like me. When it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if verse eight happens to you and you have to bend over and just I don't know. I've been burned before. It's okay if you have to tap on the slide.

And here's how God responds. Check this out. Check verse nine. "So the Lord said to him, bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon. So Abram brought these things. He cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other. The birds, however, he did not cut in half, and birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away." That's a little weird. That's a little weird, right? Let's explain that. I thought it was weird at first. When you read the historical context, it's not weird because it's a ritual. It's a common ritual that they would have. So here's what two parties would do in the



ancient world if they wanted to make a treaty, a covenant, some kind of agreement together, okay? The two people or the two tribes or what are the two parties would come together. They would gather animals, they would slaughter the animals and divide them in half. And they would form two rows, right? They would form a row over here with half of the carcass, half of the cow, and then a row over here with the other half of the animals. And they would form this line, and the two parties, or the two kings or the two individuals, whatever would walk down that line. And when they got to the end, they would make the agreement. They would exchange a belt. They would exchange something with one another. They would make these promises to one another in front of the witnesses. And the implication was, if you disobey this treaty we're making... Okay, so our tribes aren't going to war against each other, if your tribe attacks me, may you become like these animals that have been severed in half. That's the ritual, okay? The ancient world was crazy. The ancient world was crazy. That's all you need to know about ancient near eastern ideology.

Think about a wedding ceremony. It's a little weird when you think about it, right? We gather the family and friends, the grooms. We divide the families in half, right? The groom's is on this side. The bride's family is on this side. You walk down the aisle. Everybody's fancy. You exchange, I forgot my ring, sorry, babe. I think she's coming to the next service. Maybe I can find it. No, it's at home. I know where it is. I know where it is. But you walk down, you exchange these, I'm never going to recover from this. So you exchange these rings. You make these vows in front of these people and in front of God and all these witnesses, and you go through this formal thing, and you walk down in your marriage, you sign a document. It's a little strange, but that's just what our culture does to formalize this particular marriage agreement. It's a very similar thing. You're dividing the things. You're going down the aisle. So Abram does it, right? He goes out to his flock or whatever. He gets a heifer and a goat. He gets these animals, he slaughters them, he severs them in half. He lays the pieces to the side, and he gets to the front of the row. Now what? Abrams probably thinking. He's probably done this before. I've made these treaties with humans before. Usually this is the part where the two of us, we walk down together, but it's just me. What am I supposed to do? And so he waits. He could have walked away, but he had just enough faith to say, I guess I'll wait. And he waits for a long time. He waits so long that there's vultures up ahead going, hey, there's a feast. And they come down, and he's walking, 75-year-old man's walking around with his cane, chasing vultures away, right? He's waiting for a long time. He's starting to think this is ridiculous. I can't believe I believe this. I had some dream, and I believe that God was going to do this or that. This is ridiculous. But he has just enough faith to wait. And he waits for a long time, long enough that nightfall comes. Darkness comes, and he can't even stay awake, he falls asleep, but he waits. He has enough faith to wait. He falls asleep. And then in the pitch blackness, something happens that shakes him out of his sleep. Something happens. He can hear the crackling of fire. He can smell the smoke. He can feel the heat on his face. There's this fire that blazes up in the darkness. And he wakes up startled, ready to gather his things and leave. There's a fire going on. And he notices the fire is contained in a torch. And the torch moves by itself down the aisle, gets to the end and then goes out. And it's total darkness again. Now, usually the two parties would go down together. However, the torch went by itself. And what, Abram realizes that God has given him another sign. Listen. It's similar to let's say we're having a wedding and the groom comes down

by himself and makes all these, the health of the marriage depends on me only because my bride's not even down the aisle. God is saying this is going to happen, and I'm taking total responsibility for it happening. You just got to have faith to go along with it. God takes the full responsibility for the covenant happening. The implication is, if this doesn't happen, may I become like these animals, severed in half. When it comes to our faith, we all move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if you have to tap on the slide.

As I said in the beginning, I believe there's three types of people that are listening, watching online, or in the room with me. Some of you are no doubters. There's not a trace of doubt in my mind that this book is true, that God is real, that the promises he's given, the things he's called me to do were going to happen. He's going to meet my needs as I follow him. You have not a trace of doubt in your mind. Just remember, please don't pick on the other kids like me that tap on the slide. Don't pick on us, okay? That's what I want you to hear.

Notice how Yahweh responds to Abram when he has doubts. I want this to be a church where doubters can come. People who aren't Christian can come here and feel like they can belong before they believe. I want this to be that kind of place. And you do too, right? So some of you are no doubters. Some of you, like me, are occasional doubters. All right? Sometimes you doubt what God has told you to do. Sometimes you doubt that this Bible is true at all. Sometimes you pray because you have a regular prayer habit, but sometimes you wonder if it's, I mean, is it going anywhere? You have your doubts. Have enough faith to tap on the slide. And as the doubts come to your mind, don't push them to the back of your mind, because you're going to have a time where they come to the front in a moment of crisis and demand an answer. So deal with them while they're right there at the front of your mind. Think about it. Research it, process it. Talk to someone about it. Like, really ruminate on those doubts until you come to a full conclusion on those doubts. It's okay if you need to tap on the slide every now and then.

Lastly, let me talk to the frequent doubters in here. Okay? Some of you, you've been a Christian, or it's been assumed by everyone else that you're a Christian, but you're on the verge of walking away. Because I don't know about this slide. I think I might just leave the playground. You're thinking about walking away. Some of you, you're not a Christian. You're not sure you're a Christian. Someone invited you. You have a coworker that's been on you to, hey, you should come to church with me. Fine, I'll go. Whatever, right? Somebody texted you this link to a podcast. Say, hey, you should just watch online. Just watch online. So you're watching on the camera. Fine. I'll listen to this guy blabber on. You're in the kitchen cooking or something, half listening. That's fine. That's fine. Okay, some of you are frequent doubters. I just don't know if that's true. I want to say a few things. First off, I want to say that I admire you for listening. All right? We live in a world where it's really easy to be in the echo chamber, where we just listen to people who agree with us, and that's all we listen to. So I admire and appreciate that you're listening to someone that you don't agree you with. So thank you for giving me 25 minutes of your time. Secondly, I want to urge you not to leave the playground, because like I said before, there are bigger slides to doubt. There are bigger doubts to have out there in the wild. So before you leave the playground, at least consider this. And here's the third thing I want to tell you. You have been so kind, if you're a doubter, you have been so kind to listen to me blabber

on for 25 to 30 minutes. I would love the opportunity to listen to you for 30 minutes. And so here's my offer. This goes for anybody watching online, anybody listening to a podcast, unless you're listening, like, ten years in the future. But if anybody in the room here, if you're a doubter, if you're thinking about walking away from your faith or you're not a Christian at all, and you just whatever, I'll meet with you. If you'll meet with me, I'll buy you a drink. You get to choose, Starbucks or Troegs. I'll let you choose. Unless you're under 21. Then I have to choose. But I'll let you choose. I'll buy you a coffee. I'll buy you a beer. You choose. And I want to hear your story and what you doubt and what you do believe, and I'd love to hear your story. All right? So that's my offer for you. I would love to hear your story. And for all of us, let's just remember, when it comes to faith, we all move in and out of doubt. And it's okay if you need to tap on the slide every now and then.

Let me pray for let me pray for all of you. Father, I believe that there's a lot of doubters listening, and I'm even one of them on occasion. There's some people that are listening to me speak, have listened to me speak today, and they have doubts about your promises. They have doubts about things you've called them to. They have doubts about the Bible here and the things that are contained in the Bible. They have doubts about their salvation. Am I really a Christian? I don't know. They have doubts about your existence maybe, is God real? Father, I just pray that you would grant them the courage to process those doubts, to think about those doubts. Maybe they even talk to someone that they trust, their parents or whoever about their doubts. I pray that you would send them reminders, even a sign, send them reminders that you and your word are true. Would you give them that assurance in whatever way you deem fit? Would you give them just enough faith to stay on the playground, to tap the slide, using this metaphor that we've been using. And Father, I also pray that you would transform this church into a kind of place that is welcoming for those who want to belong before they believe. That we would be a church that is open to people who have questions, but they're willing to explore and show up. Would you make us into the patient kinds of people that you were with Abram. We pray this to you, Father, in the name of your son Jesus, and by the power of the Spirit. Amen.