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Genesis

Chapter 25 - God's Preservation through Polarization God's Disclosure of the Struggle Within (vs. 19-26)

Genesis 25:19-26: Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb;

And two peoples will be separated from your body;

And one people shall be stronger than the other;

And the older shall serve the younger." When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red, all over like a

hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

We come into this marvelous Book of Genesis, and we are reminded that it is not only a book about beginnings, but it also gives this picture of the early stages of mankind. It is much like when you consider children born and as they begin to mature, they initially don't have a list of do's and don'ts. The only thing they have is their sense of conscience, right and wrong that has been implanted within them, and consequences. Genesis is that book. It is the book at the very beginning of man, and it goes through those early stages in which man begins the path of maturity. As he walks on the path of maturity, we find him dealing with conscience almost immediately. You remember the whole incident with Adam and Eve in the garden, and as they sinned, it says that they hid themselves. God calls out to them, and He says, "Who

told you that you were naked?" The point of the matter is that their conscience told them. There was something inside that said, "I did something wrong." You take a little kid, and you don't have to give him a list of the Ten Commandments in order for him to know that if he takes something that you told him not to, that he's going to feel guilty. He's going to hide it from you or something similar to that. And so, we realize that there are these stages that we go through. Unfortunately, if, in fact, we choose to continue to go the wrong way, we find ourselves dealing with the consequences of those sins. And the consequence in this particular setting with Adam and Eve was that they longed for the knowledge of good and evil. And so, God goes, "Okay, you're going to experience evil. You've experienced good in the garden. You're going to experience evil." "Evil"- meaning calamity, hardship, pain, suffering, and all those things. So, "Woman, you're going to experience evil in childbirth, and man, you're going to experience hardship when you labor in the fields. And it's going to be toilsome, and this is going to be painful for you. You said you wanted to experience it, here it is." And the consequences are there. Scripture tells us the wages

of sin is death. It's the consequence; it's the thing that happens. You can say, "Well, I don't like the consequences." Yeah, but that's what they are. And so, as we look through the book, we begin to realize that we're dealing with not only a sense of conscience in dealing with those issues that haunt us inside, as Romans 2 will so aptly put it, that God has placed that sense of right and wrong within us, but God then takes us into the realm of, "And you're going to have to deal with the consequences of those sins."

The reason why it was important, by the time you get to the Book of Exodus, that God bring forth the Law is the Law really is that warning sign. So, you might be continually heading over the cliff unless you have a warning sign that says, "Don't go over that way, because if you do, you'll fall over a cliff." And that's what the Law does. It really is a gracious act of God. It is not God oppressing you. It is God warning you of the things that would cause great harm in your life. Nevertheless, in Genesis, we're not dealing with that. We're dealing with the conscience and the consequences.

Fundamentally, what Scripture demonstrates in the Book of Genesis is, pursue what you want, go how you feel, but just realize there are consequences to it. And we begin to see those things play out. I think the initial thought in everybody is, "Look, you just go with the desires of your heart. It's probably going to be okay."

Proverbs 28 reads this way,

(Proverbs 28:26) "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..."

Because once again, as we've oftentimes stated from the Book of Proverbs, there is a way which seems right, but the end thereof is death. There is a consequence to making the wrong decisions. And I think the tendency of man is to say, "Well, you know, God made me this way, and I have certain tendencies and I have certain proclivities." And it's actually the thing that we're going to be talking about today. And we almost consider ourselves a victim of those tendencies and proclivities in our lives. And God says, "You have to surrender those. Those were given to you to surrender. They weren't given to you so that you would go by them."

There's an interesting passage in the Book of Ecclesiastes if you look with me in Chapter 11. And it reminds us that there are no guarantees to life.

(Ecclesiastes 11:2) "... you do not know what misfortune may occur..."

There are things which we cannot see, that we cannot know, and that are coming around the corner. We can't know everything. In spite of this, we make decisions based on oftentimes our feelings or emotions. And Scripture never says, "Don't do that." It just says, "Just be careful when you do it." Because when you're making decisions, there are consequences that will come. So, you might want to consider God. Because if you don't consider God, then you won't have a moral compass. You won't understand where to go.

It says this,

(Ecclesiastes 11:8) "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility."

(Ecclesiastes 11:9) Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things."

Go ahead. Make your decisions. God has given you free will. He's given you desires and not all the things that we go after are wrong, but you might want to consider that there are consequences to your choices.

Therefore, you might want to remember a passage like Proverbs 3:5-6, that you might want to trust in the Lord with all your heart and not lean on your own understanding. You might want to allow Him to direct all your paths. And so, as we come to this, we begin to realize that many of these paragons that begin start off pretty good. Nevertheless, they have a hard time finishing well. And time and events and circumstances and surroundings all play a role in revealing, I would say, our strengths and our weaknesses. And it doesn't take long before those weaknesses really become extremely blatant before us. There is a saying that was given a number of

years ago, "The measure of a man is tested by what it takes to stop him." And you begin to realize that there are things that come into our life. We know the right thing to do. We know where we should be going. God has placed the Law within our hearts. Nevertheless, in the process, we find ourselves waning from that which God calls us to.

Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, and he says, "Finish the course. Endure hardship. Do the work. Fulfill the ministry." He's fundamentally saying, "Don't give up."

Hebrews will put it this way in Hebrews 3:6 and 14, "Hold fast, remain firm until the end." That's the hard part. Let me put it another way. That's the sign of maturity.

Anybody can begin well, but it's maturity that endures to the end.

And so, that's why when you look at the very definition of maturity in 1 Corinthians 13, what does it say about love? Love never fails. What it's talking about is, of course, it's an enduring quality. And so, the passing of time and trials can wear us down.

And that's the reason you come to Galatians 6:9; Paul writes, "Don't grow weary. Don't lose heart." Because the

tendency is to throw in the towel, and after a while, to start coasting. And as we were looking specifically with Abraham, even Abraham began to grow somewhat complacent about these things. We all deal with the vicissitudes of life, the ups and the downs, the hardships, the pain, the sorrow, the things that are unpredictable that come into our life, and some deal with it in different ways. Some people give up, some people get angry, some people feel anxious. There are different ways in which we begin to try to deal with these things. Some become complacent, as we were talking about. That was one of the concerns that Paul had for the church at Thessalonica. He says, "I know that you're feeling hopeless, and so the problem with that is that you're going to your pleasures to find some sort of self-gratification at this moment. And what you need to do is turn to God. You need to turn to your faith. But we all deal with problems in different ways, and some of us strategize and manipulate. And quite frankly, that's one of the things that we're going to see with Jacob. That was his tendency and that was the way that he went. The fact of the matter is that we're all wrestling through these things. But interestingly enough,

God has given us different personalities and leanings and tendencies. God has given us dispositions and temperaments that cause us to see these things differently, to deal with them differently. Some people I would describe as mild-mannered, others aggressive and demanding. Some people you might see as cunning and covert, other people are very open and overt. We deal with things differently and it's not that those tendencies are bad in and of themselves, but when your proclivities or your tendencies actually become your preference in dealing with things in life, that's when things start going awry. You say to yourself, "Well, that's just the way I am. That's the way I handle things." I remember... I don't know if I remember, I actually know, that I had a tendency to have a bad temper. And that was my tendency. And I could say to people, "Yuu know, I'm a little Irish," there's something in there with that. But I can't use that as an excuse. Now, God has given us those tendencies and proclivities, and we would say, "Okay, it's God's fault because He gave these things to me." And I would say, "It's not God's fault. God is giving you something to give back to Him." And strangely enough, it is going to be our

weaknesses that will drive us into the arms of God, and it will be our strength that we will actually surrender to Him as we begin to trust Him for all of our needs and our directions. And so, as we come to this, we come with that thought in mind as we deal with different individuals.

And as we come to this particular passage, we're going to see Jacob and Esau, two different kinds of people in the same household. How could that be? You look at different households, and you go, "How could they be brother and sister? It just doesn't match. They just seem so different." And God will oftentimes do that to not only reveal our own weaknesses and our tendencies, but also to reveal that within those, you want to make sure that you don't go with those tendencies.

And so, this passage starts off in Genesis 25:19,
(Genesis 25:19) "Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: ..."

He's off to a good start.

"... Abraham became the father of Isaac."

What the text is saying is that we have the influence of a good father; we have the influence of his faith, and initially what we're going to see is Isaac responding according to the faith that he knows. We call it the faith of our fathers, right? And so, his father learned that lesson the hard way. We hope as parents that our children will learn it from us, so they don't have to go the hard way.

So, it reads this way in verse 20,

(Genesis 25:20) "and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean (Syrian) of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean (Syrian), to be his wife."

It continues to use that word, "Syrian," which is not only making reference to the fact that they were distant relatives in this sense, but also, there were tendencies that now entered into the home that perhaps hadn't been in Abraham's home. That's what marriage does. It takes whole groups of people, and it pulls them together, and they're not always very much alike. I just think the subtlety of Scripture, just slipping in the name Laban there again, is letting us know that you have a lot of

manipulation and strategy that is going to come into the play.

As you read in verse 21,

(Genesis 25:21) "Isaac prayed to the LORD..."

Well, now, this is his father shining. Abraham learned to come to God to prayer.

His wife, Rebecca, was not bearing children,

"Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived."

You go, "Wow, if it had been that simple, I would have done it a long time ago." What we know is that he waited 20 years. That's longer than Abraham waited before he dealt with the whole issue with Hagar. It was only about 10 years with that. But he waits 20 years and then prays.

How do we know that?

Well, if you drop on down, it actually says in verse 26,

(Genesis 25:26) "... and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them."

That is to say, he was 40 years old when he got married. He's now 60 years old when his wife gives birth to a child. So, he has now waited for 20 years. However, what you see is not only patience that he had learned, but also the desire to turn to God for those problems. Our weaknesses drive us to God. That's the wonderful thing. I mean, people say all the time, "Why am I like this? Why do I have this problem?" And I would say, God is driving you to Himself, because without the weaknesses, you wouldn't turn to Him. It's not our natural disposition to do that. James 4 reminds us, as well as James 1, "Ask, ask. Just make sure you don't do it with wrong motives. Come before Me."

I like Psalm 91, the way it's put, verses 14 through 16, "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him." It's God literally saying, "You came to Me because you loved Me. I'm going to answer that prayer because I want to demonstrate My love to you."

We're familiar with passages like Psalm 138, which says, "The Lord will accomplish what concerns me."

We're familiar with Psalm 37, which says, "If you delight yourself in the Lord, He'll give you the desires of your heart." All of those are good reminders that God longs to be gracious to you, as Isaiah would say.

Nevertheless, in verse 22, we almost feel a change in the midst of this. And once again, that whole concept of separation within.

It says this in verse 22,

(Genesis 25:22) "But the children struggled together within her..."

Obviously, she is about to have twins.

"... and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" ..."

So, she had learned from her husband, so she goes to God in prayer. Things are happening right on schedule, doing things that are right, and so God begins to reveal to her these hidden secrets.

My point is that Isaac and Rebekah are off to a really good start. It's the case all the way through the Book of Genesis, always off to a good start. When we begin to change and we begin to do the right things, good things

begin to happen. God reveals things to us. Nevertheless, God has given a warning that "There are two within you." And in many ways, I think what the passage is saying is that you have two desires in your household; because what we're going to find out, and we're not going to go into verses 27 through 34 today, but Isaac's going to lean towards Esau and Rebekah's going to lean towards Jacob. So, you have two different ways of thinking that are within the household.

God puts it this way in verse 23,

(Genesis 25:23) The LORD said to her, "Two nations..."

Two "*gôy*"; two great masses of people, humanity.

"... are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger.""

These are strange things if you think about it, because you would think that it was to be the strongest one that would be the one that would be ruling, and you would think that it would be the oldest one that would be the one that would be in authority. Nevertheless, things are

going to be shifted around. God is letting them know that there are going to be two kinds of people, two ways of thinking, two kinds of temperaments. Physical traits are going to come into play.

If you look in the passage when it says in verse 24,

(Genesis 25:24) "When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

(Genesis 25:25) Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau."

The word that is used there is "bristly". So, here you have an individual that is bristly and a little disheveled. You would not picture him as the neat person in the household necessarily, but the one that just kind of throws his laundry on the floor. And so, you have this one by the name of Esau, which just fundamentally makes reference to being red.

(Genesis 25:26) "Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel..."

"*Āqēb*," which is actually where we get the word "*ya'āqōb*," which is "Jacob," which is a heel holder. That's

fundamentally what his name means. So, there he is, his hand holding on to Esau's heel, and his name will be called "heel holder," or "heel grabber".

"... and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them."

The passage makes reference to them both having different physical traits and different base desires. Once again, neither wrong in and of themselves. However, what's going to happen is both are going to struggle with these tendencies and God's going to have to deal with them in this. The consequences of going with your inclinations are horrific because as we began to make decisions based on, "Well, this is just the way that I feel," we began to go down a path of great destruction and horrible consequences as the time goes on. It started off right; pray to God; turn to God. "Why is this? What's going on? Why did You give me these tendencies?" And God will begin to direct our paths. Submit these things unto the Lord. Take your strength, take your abilities, and take your prowess. Surrender them to God. God will use them greatly. Take them on your own desires, and say,

"I'm going to let them direct my paths instead of Him directing my paths," you're going to find yourself in a mess of trouble.

What's interesting about these two individuals, and as we mentioned, they're clearly very different, and Isaac was drawn to the one, Esau, and Rebekah will be drawn to the other son, Jacob. Scripture doesn't comment about whether or not these tendencies are good and bad.

They're born that way. But what we'll see is that there's another issue that will make them different and separate them, and that will be the true separation of them. It will not be their personalities; it will not be their tendencies. You know, my brother and I were very different, but we loved each other very dearly. So, it's not those differences that will necessarily separate you. It will be the decisions that you make that will separate you. And so, as the Scripture will go on, it will begin to define Jacob as one who will long for God's blessing. While Esau, as you look at verse 34, how does it end? He despised the blessing of God. You'll have Jacob who will ultimately be teachable. His mother and father would tell him, "Go this way, do

this." And he does it. He's obedient in this. But Esau will be incorrigible and will marry women that that just drives Rebecca crazy. She says, "If I have to live with this woman, I'd rather be dead." And that's an interesting way of putting it. One will submit to authority; the other will rebel. One will seek peace; the other will seek war. What Scripture will reveal to us is that different personalities and different proclivities will lean us one way, but that's not the dividing force. The dividing force is the decisions that you make in right or wrong, and the things that you really long for. And will you submit these things that God has given you unto Him?

Now, what we'll find out, of course, is that Jacob is clearly a supplanter. That's what he does. And so, he'll try to deceive his way into his birthright. He'll try to find some way to trick his father. And if it means that he has to dress up like Esau, if it means that he has to sound like him in any way, whatever, he's going to find some way to get this birthright. Well, that's supplanting. But God sees his heart, and what is his heart? His heart is longing for what? The blessings of God. That's what he longs for. And

oftentimes, we go about things in the wrong way, and there will be consequences to that. And so, what God does in His graciousness is He puts him in the household of Laban, and Laban, of course, works him over time and time again, changes his wages. You know, all you have to do if you're a manipulative person is to find someone more manipulative than you and let them just use you up. And then after a while, you begin to go, "Wow, I don't think this manipulation is such a good idea." And so, we realize that what God's going to do is He's going to train Jacob. Now, Jacob will be trainable, albeit not easy. He's going to go through a lot of years of training. But God sees the heart and He's going to bring him through that. And Jacob will ultimately surrender these things. The fundamental principle is that you can have your tendencies and your leanings, but you can't allow them to make your decisions for you. You have to keep coming back to God to do this.

What we're going to find as we go into this is, of course, that people have their preferences. And if in fact you allow your preferences to make the decisions, then you

will always end up deciding wrong. Isaac will end up deciding wrong because why does he love Esau? It'll go on to say because he's a hunter and he likes hunters. He likes the wild meat, and he goes, "I think I like this son better." Well, your preference led you to the wrong road. And so, you don't want to go that way. I've heard people say, "Well, God is preferential. He chooses certain people. And I would say, yes, He does. But here's how He chooses you: He chooses you based on whosoever will. Scripture says, "Whosoever will believe in Him will have everlasting life." But that's whosoever will believe. Or whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved. So, He's not a respecter of persons.

In fact, Romans 2 says very clearly, God is not a respecter of persons.

Acts 10:34. Peter says, "I now know that God does not show partiality." It's for anybody that wants to be the whosoever, to do the right thing.

And so, what we see are these two individuals that are fighting over what is going to be the right thing, and one will choose the right way, and he won't be chosen by God

because necessarily of his greatness. Of course, we know God is sovereign and before the foundation of the world, but what we're going to see is that here you have an individual within a passage that begins to long for the right things and is willing to let go of those things that would be his natural desires. Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1 will remind us that there are not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, but God chooses the weak and the foolish things of the world. And so, it really has nothing to do with status, personality, prowess, background, or any of those things that we would have a tendency to say, "This is our strength. Scripture will even say, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord. So, we all battle with the flesh. We all have our thoughts that "This is just the way that I am. These are just my tendencies. And Scripture is letting us know something. You want to know what it is? You don't have an excuse. Because that desire was given to you to surrender.

Let me give you an example of this. And we've already seen it specifically with Abraham. What was the tendency of Abraham? He wanted a son. I mean, there was no doubt about he had a lot of money. He had a lot of riches. God had given him great strength to even defeat armies with his men. Not something he cared about. What he cared about is he wanted a son. More than anything he wanted a son. God gave him one. For what purpose? To lay on the altar. Once he laid that son on the altar, then what did God do? "Well, I'm going to give you far more. Not only the son am I going to spare, but because you have not spared your only son, I'm going to give you all things." Why does He give us the things that He gives us? Why do we have them? We use them as an excuse to sin. We go, "Well, God gave me this personality because that's obviously the way He wants me to sin." And that's not why God gave you the personality. He gave it to you to surrender.

I remember a number of years ago, my father was sharing about an individual that had a great voice and a voice in which many people were asking him to sing in the realm

of the world, worldly talent. And he had actually had an offer that was very substantial. And yet he felt the calling of God to go to the mission field. He went to the mission field. And in the particular tribe that he felt led to be in, he found out that they didn't believe in music. He ministered in that tribe for over 25 years and never sang a note. There are things that God gives us to surrender. It is our strength. It's our weaknesses that will draw us to Him. We realize, like Rebekah and Isaac, "We can't give birth to a child. We'll come to God." And so, we pray. Just to let you know, that's one of the reasons why you have weaknesses. That's the reason why you have lack, is that you might turn to Him. It's those areas. But the areas of our strengths we begin to rely upon, and we use those to be preferential things in our lives, and before long we begin making decisions based on, well, our leanings. And God says, "Don't do that. Don't lean on your own understanding. Don't allow these things to direct your paths. Let Me direct your paths. Surrender them to Me." You realize that all the way through you have examples of this in Scripture.

Let me give you some examples of those. The Bible tells us about personalities in some way when you go to the New Testament. You see James and John. You remember one of the names that they were called? "Sons of thunder." And the reason why is that they were going through the territory of the Samaritans, and the Samaritans were blocking Jesus from going. And of course, James and John go, "We just need to call fire down from heaven to destroy them." Now, that was the nature of John. But as you read the Gospel of John, you read 1 John and 2 John and 3 John, what's the phrase that you read over and over again? "Love God, love one another." You go, "That's not John." What John surrendered was his nature before God, and he becomes a new person. Our goal isn't to function in the realm of who we are. Our goal is to function into the realm of who He is. We take on the form of Christ in us. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. We all have to surrender different things. I mean, some of us, like I said, are very aggressive, and you have to surrender that. Other people are more passive, and they have to surrender that.

Peter was an individual, that I guess if you were to describe his nature, it would be fundamentally a person of great hubris. That is to say, he was always stating that he could do great things without really thinking about it. Unfortunately, I think his confidence was more in self than it was in God. But God would deal with that. And He would humble him to the place where Peter would ultimately know, "I can't do anything. I mean, if this little girl was scaring me, then I can't do anything." And God goes, "Now, you're ready to preach." Because then, Peter will have his confidence in God, and now he's not afraid of anything. But he has to surrender that sense of, "It's all me. I'm in control." Peter surrendered who Peter was; his tendencies and the way that he thought; his temperament when you consider. He surrenders all those things.

The same thing is true when you think of Paul. Paul is an extremely aggressive individual. We know according to Philippians 3 that he has all these trophies, and he was more of a Jew than anybody else. And if you didn't think he was, he'd fight you about it. He was not only a

Pharisee of Pharisees, but a Sanhedrin of Sanhedrins. He was so aggressive that he would kill anybody that wasn't going to be following God. He would surrender that. In fact, his statement there in Philippians 3 is, "Whatever was gained for me, I count as loss for Christ. I don't want to be me anymore. I want to be Christ." It's literally the surrendering of that.

Timothy is going to have to surrender his timidity. You have a young man; he's just afraid. And Paul will continue to write letters like, "Don't be ashamed of me. I'm in prison. Don't be ashamed. Don't be afraid." Timothy's going to have to deal with very wealthy people, very powerful people in the city of Ephesus. He's now going to pastor that church. And most of them are not Jewish, and they're going to be very aggressive against him. He's going to have to do something that would be the last thing he'd want to do- take a stand. He's going to have to come before them. He's going to have to reprove, rebuke, exhort, and sound doctrine. That's not Timothy. That's not who he is. God is calling all of us to not be who we are. See, we mess up when we think, "God made me that

way." Yeah, to surrender. And you're all going to have to surrender something different than I do. But God is saying, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. All things have become new. I don't want you thinking the way that you thought anymore." God is changing our hearts.

You're going to have different people coming out, and you're going to see different kinds of struggles. Esau is going to deal with the struggle in the wrong way. He's not going to turn to God. He's not going to love the right things. He's not going to be teachable. He's not going to listen to authority. Listen to authority. Be teachable. Hear the word of God. Listen to what it says. There are going to be times in which Scripture tells you to do something. You're going to go, "Yeah, it's just not my nature to do that." Forget about that. We're asking you to do something that's supernatural.

Paul will write this in Romans 7, "It's my nature to sin." It is your nature to sin, isn't it? What am I going to do? He said, "Wretched man that I am, what am I going to do? Who's going to set me free from this?" And then he takes

us into Chapter 8, "There's therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus." What Christ has done is He sacrificed and died for your sins; so that now what you can do is you can come before Him, and you can admit something that you were afraid to admit before. You can admit, "I'm a sinner." You can come before God and you go, "I've been thinking all wrong; I've been doing it all wrong," and you can say that because you're not going to be condemned for doing it. And then, His Spirit is going to empower you to do whatever God wants you to do. See, that's the advantage that we have over those that are in Genesis. We have the Spirit of God that has sealed us until the day of redemption. And the Spirit of God gives us that push across the finish line. Because by ourselves, we wouldn't ever do that. We'll start off good, and our thought is that man, just by sheer resolve, we're going to make it, but none of them make it. But with the Spirit of God, Paul will say, "I have finished the course." And we can finish just as strong as when we began, stronger by the Spirit of God. He gives us a Spirit that wants to obey the Father. He gives us a Spirit that wants to be teachable. He gives us a

Spirit that will be compliant to the will of God and will just say, "Not my will, but Yours be done." And as we say that, we find ourselves crossing the finish line. How wonderful is that? You don't have your personality to be an excuse anymore.

We're going to see different kinds of personalities, very unique people. And some of you are going to identify with them, and you're going to go, "That's me." I remember my father-in-law; it was one of the most touching moments because, of course, most of his life, he was not a believer. And it was a miracle in and of itself. I never thought I'd see him come to know the Lord, but he received the Lord. And I never thought I'd see him walk through that door and come into church, but he did. And he would come faithfully. And as I came into the house after one of the services, he told me, not a man of many words, working in the shipyards all his life as a foreman, he just says, "Come here." So, when he said, "Come here," you just come here. And I walked in, he opened up his Bible to where I had been preaching in Genesis, interestingly enough, and he pointed to a character. I

won't tell you which one. He said, "That's me. That's me." I said, "There's been a change, hasn't there?" He goes, "Yeah." God doesn't want us to be me anymore. He wants us to be Him.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today and we just ask that You change our hearts. We are born a certain way. The psalmist will say, "In sin, my mother conceived me." We have these natural tendencies and they're all very different from one another. Nevertheless, You can change us into Your image. You tell us no longer to be conformed to the world, but be transformed into the image of Christ. And so, Lord, we lay at Your feet those tendencies, those proclivities of our lives. We don't want that to be our preference. We don't want that to be that which guides us in our life. We're going to lay these at Your feet, and we're just going to say, "You direct our paths. We surrender all." We're so thankful that we can come to You and admit all of our faults and that You died for us and that You saved us and that You have now given us of Your

Spirit that if we will receive You as Lord and Savior, You will give us the power to submit to our Lord, to submit to You.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. We're asking you to get rid of the excuses and to embrace the One that you love.