

99-09-12a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to 1 Kings chapter 8. 1 Kings chapter 8. One of the major themes in our study this morning, as I mentioned, is God's grace, God's forgiveness, and the fact that God's purposes are not hindered even when we fail. God will, in fact, incorporate, He has taken into account the fact that we are fallible. He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust, David says in the Psalms.

And we sometimes think, well, God is really going to have a problem working around our sinfulness, or our failures, or our lack of understanding. And yet, the scriptures are a testimony to the fact that God is so great that He can work all things together for good. He can accomplish His purpose and weave into the fabric of His plan the fact that we are not perfect.

It is important for us to remember at the same time that this is not a license to fail. It should not reduce our concern or our desire to do the right thing and to be pleasing in God's sight. This is not an inducement to relax and say, well, Christianity is not a crutch, it's a stretcher.

I'm just going to kick back and let God carry me to glory on wings of angels and not try. And Paul had to make this same caution over in Romans when he said, well, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. So then should we go on sinning so that grace can really abound? That's not the point.

But it is nevertheless important that we recognize the wonderful grace of God, the mercy of God, the love of God for us that is not put off by our failures, is not put off by our sinfulness, but in fact will work in and through all kinds of circumstances to not only affect God's purposes but also to bless those who are seeking Him, those who love God, those who recognize the calling, and who in spite of their failures continue to return and claim the grace and the forgiveness of God. When Solomon finished building the temple, he assembled the people, and on this momentous day when the presence of God comes to rest in a fixed place rather than in the tabernacle which was built for a transient people, a people moving through the wilderness, a people with no fixed abode, now the temple has been constructed on solid foundations on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. And on the day of dedication, Solomon stands before the altar of the Lord.

This is 1 Kings 8, verse 22. And this is going to be the place of approach. This is the place to come before God with sacrifices, whether they're sin offerings or the sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Whatever the occasion may be, this is the place where the presence of God will dwell. This is where the priests of God will minister. This is the place, this will be the center of worship life in Israel for centuries to come.

So in 1 Kings 8, verse 22, Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. And he said, can you imagine, by the way, somebody standing up in some of our more conservative denominational churches and spreading out their hands toward heaven as they pray? You know, this lifting of hands is not an intrinsically bad thing. It only becomes strange when strange people do it.

But Solomon spread out his hands toward heaven and he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like you who keep your covenant and mercy with your servants who walk before you with all their hearts. I probably don't need to remind you that in our study of Genesis we have seen that the covenants that God makes, stated clearly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are conditional covenants. We do not see the idea of an unconditional covenant.

Now, God's performance of his purpose is unconditional. And that's a healthy thing to recognize. And it's part of what we're seeing this morning, that God can affect his purposes regardless of what we do.

We can't thwart God's eternal purpose. But whether or not we participate on the blessing side, on the productive and fruitful side of God's plan, is totally conditional. And you find it stated again here.

God keeps his covenant and mercy with his servants who walk before him with all their hearts. If you're a servant who does not walk before God with all your heart, you're not going to find yourself on the mercy side of God's character. Verse 24.

You have kept what you promised your servant David, my father. You have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled it with your hand, as it is this day. Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what you promised your servant David, my father, saying, you shall not fail to have a man sit before me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before me as you have walked before me.

Once again, the perpetual nature of a Davidic heir on the throne of David is predicated on taking heed to their way and walking before God. Verse 26. Now I pray, O God of Israel, let your word come true, which you have spoken to your servant David, my father.

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built. Yet regard the prayer of your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which your servant is praying before you today, that your eyes may be opened toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which you said, My name shall be there, that you may hear the prayer which your servant makes toward this place. And may you hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place, here in heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

When anyone sins against his neighbor and is forced to take an oath and comes and takes an oath before your altar in this temple, then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness. When your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and confess your name and pray and make supplication to you in this temple, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land which you gave to their fathers. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, that you may teach them the good way in which they should walk and send rain on your land which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

I could spend two or three lessons just on these three verses here, these two verses, 35 and 36. You notice that the change of mind that John the Baptist is calling for, that Jesus is calling for in our Luke study, what is the nature of that change of mind? We've had a crowd that says, well, 1 John 1.9, just name your sins before God and you're all done. Notice what Solomon understands about repentance or change of mind.

There is divine discipline. God has removed blessing. God has removed provision.

This is an agricultural economy. Without rain, there are no crops. Without crops, there are no flocks and herds or they suffer greatly.

And without sustenance, people perish. It's a famine. And this is a denial of those things that God provides by way of logistics.

But this is in the nature of divine discipline. Because they have sinned against you, when they pray toward this place, what do they do? They confess God's name. It doesn't even say confess their sins.

It says confess God's name. And they turn from their sin because they have been afflicted. The affliction brings them to their senses and they recognize that they have committed offense against God and they confess God's name.

In the course of confessing God's name, what are you confessing? You go over to Exodus 34 and Exodus 20 and other places where it says that God reserves mercy for thousands. God reserves mercy for those who acknowledge Him and who walk before Him, who are obedient, who return to Him after failure. That's where mercy is found.

But He visits the iniquity of those who rebel, who are apathetic, who are indifferent. He visits their iniquity on their heads and on their children's heads and even their grandchildren and great-grandchildren when those generations persist in the attitude of

the father. When they pray toward this place and confess your name, this is acknowledging God.

This is restoring God to His rightful place in priority. They turn from their sin because you afflict them. They not only acknowledge it, but they stop that sin.

They get out of that pattern. Then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, so that you may teach them the good way in which they should walk. And this is a learning experience.

Our failures can be productive when we learn from them, when we learn the good and right way in which to walk. Then God will send rain on the land which He has given to His people as an inheritance. Verse 37, when there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague or whatever sickness there is, kind of reminds us of what happened in Egypt, doesn't it? You can experience the life of unbelievers.

And this is spoken to Israel. This is the people of God here. These are not rank unbelievers that God is trying to get saved.

These are the people of God who become apathetic, indifferent, rebellious, disobedient, who persist in failure. There will be famine, there will be pestilence, blight, locusts, mildew, plagues, sicknesses. All of the things that befell the land of Egypt can befall believers.

Verse 38, whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone or by all your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart and spreads out his hands toward this temple, then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart you know, for you alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land which you gave to our fathers. Moreover, concerning a foreigner who is not of your people Israel but has come from a far country for your name's sake, for they will hear of your great name and your strong hand and your outstretched arm, when he comes and prays toward this temple, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by your name. When your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the Lord toward the city which you have chosen and the temple which I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication and maintain their cause.

When they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin, and you become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near, yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were

carried captive and repent and make supplication to you in the land of those who took them captive, saying, We have sinned and done wrong. We have committed wickedness. There is your confession, your acknowledgement of the sin.

And when they return to you with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive and pray to you toward the land which you gave to their fathers, the city which you have chosen and the temple which I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against you and grant them compassion before those who took them captive that they may have compassion on them for they are your people and your inheritance whom you brought out of Egypt out of the iron furnace, that your eyes may be opened to the supplication of your servant and to the supplication of your people Israel to listen to them whenever they call to you for you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your inheritance as you spoke by your servant Moses when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God. So this is the prayer that Solomon prays. It isn't interesting that he doesn't go on and on about the beautiful ornamentation and the gold and the skill and the workmanship that went into the building of the temple.

Solomon recognizes that this is going to be the place of supplication. This is going to be the place to which people are going to return after their failures. And much of his prayer to God is for mercy because he knows Israel is going to fail.

He knows that we all sin. And you think, well, this is great for Israel, but what about me? I'm not in Israel. I'm the church.

We don't have the temple. There's no two stones standing one on top of the other today. And Israel itself has gone out under discipline and has not yet been restored as the people of God.

So what does this mean for us? The land, the city of Jerusalem, the temple itself, you see over and over again, Solomon, when he thinks about these things, thinks about the fact that these are the chosen people of God to whom God, through covenant promise, has granted an inheritance. We are also the people of God. We also have the dwelling place of God.

And we also have an inheritance. And while the concrete expression of these things is different for believers in the church, the principle is the same. Where is the temple today? Where is the dwelling place of God? It is in the hearts of those who seek Him.

It is in the hearts of those who are obedient. It is not in the hearts of all believers, by the way. You go over and study John 14-17 and discover that the one who has Jesus' words and keeps them, he is the one who loves the Lord.

And Jesus said, I will come to him, and I and my Father will make our home with him. It is reiterated in Revelation 3.20, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. This is knocking at the door of a believer's heart.

If anyone will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me. To enjoy the personal presence of God, the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, that is a reward, that is a blessing for those who are seeking, for those who are walking according to the words of the Lord. It is not granted to all believers any more than it was granted to the nation of Israel through all generations.

When Israel departed from the Lord as a nation, the presence of the Lord left the nation. But it is a wonderful promise. And the principle of forgiveness when we return, it doesn't matter how great our failures, you notice the discipline that Solomon mentions gets progressively greater and greater.

It starts out with the rain being withheld. And this is the beginning of famine. This is the beginning of hard times.

But they can return at that point. If that doesn't work, then there can be a more severe famine. There can be pestilence and plagues.

And if they respond at that point and return, then God will restore. The rain will fall. The land will be renewed.

But if they persist in disobedience, then even greater divine discipline comes. And they are actually taken captive. If you go back and study in the words of Moses to Israel, the different phases or cycles of discipline, it's been called the five cycles of divine discipline.

The fifth cycle, the final phase of divine discipline is to actually be taken captive and to be removed from the inheritance. And there are corollaries or analogies to those cycles of discipline even today. I personally don't think that they fall at a national level as they did on the nation of Israel because the nation of Israel is an illustration or a paradigm for us of the individual believer's life.

And these progressively greater expressions of God's love through discipline take place in our individual lives. And we can lose control over parts of our lives. And we can actually reach a point of no return in this life if we persist.

And after God's warning discipline, after intensive discipline, after discipline that removes even our personal autonomy, if it doesn't return us to the Lord, our career as an individual will parallel that of the nation of Israel. National Israel is a wonderful illustration of what happens on an individual level today. All the way from bondage in Egypt, deliverance under the blood of the Lamb, the sojourn in the wilderness, the crossing of Jordan into the place of opportunity, the place of prosperity, the place of

inheritance.

Whether or not we maintain possession and enjoyment of that inheritance, it all depends on what we choose. And we are going to fail. And it is not so much whether or not we fail, it's what we do afterward that counts.

You cannot find a greater magnitude of failure than in the life of David. It's not the magnitude of his failures, it is the magnitude of his repentance. It's the magnitude of his claim on the grace of God that is his monument in Scripture.

This is the reason David is a man after God's own heart. David is an adulterer. David is a murderer.

David is a lousy parent. David raises up sons who kill each other. David prioritizes the wrong things.

He makes many mistakes. But Jesus Christ Himself takes the name Son of David to Himself. Why? Not because of David's failures, but because of David's heart for the Lord.

No matter how badly he fails, no matter how long he persists in unfaithfulness or distraction or whatever it might be, David always returns to the Lord. And when you read the Psalms and you see David's understanding of God's grace and God's mercy, David never intended to be a great sinner. He never intended to take advantage of the grace of God by being lackadaisical.

David's great legacy is being a man of faith and being a man after God's own heart. And that is the opportunity that exists for us today. We can turn to God.

We don't have to turn toward the temple in Jerusalem and pray in that direction. The place of residence of God is in our own hearts. We don't have to go to the priests and offer a sacrifice.

We can act as our own priests and offer the sacrifice of praise and of a willing and obedient heart to God. All of the things that pertain in the nation of Israel are ours at a higher level. But the grace of God remains unchanged and He is scanning the earth looking for those who will avail themselves of His grace and His mercy.

It's a wonderful, wonderful principle in Scripture. It's one that is at the forefront as we return to our study in Genesis where we find an unhappy series of events taking place in Genesis chapter 27. Up to this point, we don't know too much about the moral life of Jacob.

All we have seen of him thus far is his great desire to possess the birthright, to possess the things that are part of the heritage of his family. And we can't really fault him for this when he looks at his brother and sees Esau's indifference to the things that are so

important to Jacob. What we can fault him for is not his desire for these things, but the means by which he decides to get them.

And it is not an honorable thing. He obtains the birthright by taking advantage of his brother's weakness. But this is not God's way.

We don't hold this up as an example of great character, of integrity, of someone being an honorable man who operates in this way. We are at the stage in Luke chapter 4 where Jesus is undergoing temptation in the wilderness and attempting to get someone to make a decision or make a commitment when they are weak and when they are vulnerable. This is a stratagem of Satan, not of God.

This is what Satan does to Eve in the garden. This is what Satan does to Jesus in the wilderness. This is not the mark of honor or integrity or God-given character.

This is not ultimately, if you want to boil it down to one phrase, this is not walking in faith. There is no faith involved in finagling the birthright away from Esau. That is all we have seen of Jacob's moral character up to chapter 27.

When we get to chapter 27 and Rebecca overhears the fact that Isaac in his own time of weakness, in his own time of blindness, is going to bestow the blessing on Esau when God has already stated before the twins were born that the elder should serve the younger. Isaac is going to pronounce a blessing on whom he thinks is Esau. He is going to pronounce a blessing that makes the brothers servants.

And if Isaac had his way, he would have pronounced a blessing on Esau that made Jacob his servant. And this is totally counter to what God said. God said the elder shall serve the younger.

So Esau, or Isaac rather, I am going to continue to confuse those. I don't know if it is because they both start with a vowel or what. But you know what I mean, whatever I am saying.

Isaac is about to do something in a time of weakness that is wrong. And this private calling in of the blessing, this bring me a good meal from the field, he tells Esau to go out and hunt this game down and make him a savory stew, this is Isaac's own concoction. He has thought this up.

He is doing it behind closed tent flaps, if you will. But there are so many ironies in Genesis and you remember that Sarah heard something behind the tent flap that resulted in Isaac getting his name. Because Sarah laughed when she heard God speaking.

She heard him through the tent flap and she laughed and said, I am an old woman, am I going to have a child? And so Isaac winds up being called Yitzchak, which is from the

verb to laugh. And now Rebecca hears something through the tent flap that Yitzchak is about to do, which is another expression of failure. But when you see something coming that you know is not in accordance with the will of God, what do you do? When you see something that is desirable about to go in a direction away from you, what do you do? Even if it is a legitimate thing.

The blessing and the birthright are two components that Isaac has the ability to bestow on one or the other of his sons. They are, by right, the possession of the firstborn. And it would seem that he is doing the right thing in attempting to bestow the blessing.

The birthright has already been contracted away to Jacob, and apparently Isaac knows this. Esau certainly has not forgotten it. But you see a legitimate thing and it seems to be in jeopardy.

Possession of it seems to be slipping away and you want it very badly. What are you going to do? Jacob wanted the birthright. He obtained it, but he did it by his own efforts.

He did the whole stew thing on his own. There is no falling down before God and saying, Oh God, how can you allow these wonderful legitimate things, the heritage of my grandfather Abraham, to go to a man who doesn't value it, who doesn't have a heart for you. You don't see any prayer, you don't see any worship, you don't see any turning toward the Lord.

It's all Jacob's doing. Now, when the blessing is about to go astray, and Rebekah knows it, and she tells Jacob, and he knows it, they conspire together by their own efforts to see that it goes where it ought to go. And this gets at the crux of the problem.

Because there are two stages. One stage is we don't even prioritize, we don't even desire the right things. We want security, we want prosperity, we want circumstances that are pleasing, we want happiness, we want fulfillment, we want relationships.

There are lots of things that we want and we make those an object. We make those a goal for ourselves. Well, that's obviously wrong.

All of Christendom would probably agree if we made that statement. Prioritizing these things instead of relationship with God, God's plan and God's purpose, that's a wrong thing. Everybody agrees on that.

But we're past that point now with Jacob and with Rebekah. They want a good thing. They want something that's biblical, if you will.

They want something that's in accordance with what God has stated. These things ought to be, in God's will and God's purpose, they ought to belong to Jacob. God wants them to go to Jacob.

God intends for them to belong to Jacob. But now it is the means by which these things are obtained that is an issue. And you find that nobody, you can't find anybody in Christian circles who thinks that Jacob did the right thing by big dealing his brother out of the birthright or by deceiving his father out of the blessing.

Two wrongs don't make a right. I think a lot of them don't realize that Isaac is doing a wrong thing by trying to bestow them on Esau. And we've observed that in this passage.

This is a wrong thing. Isaac is in the wrong. But you can become indignant and you can become upset and concerned and panicky even at the thought that somebody is about to do a wrong thing.

And you think, you know, this ought to be a different way. This is wrong and so we need to stop this. We need to make it turn out right.

But the end does not justify the means. The end is right. The end is in accordance with the word of God and that is to possess the blessing.

But the means by which Rebecca and Jacob go about getting this is not right. It's wrong. And this is going to cost Rebecca and it's going to cost Jacob.

The purpose is achieved. Jacob gets the blessing and Jacob has gotten the birthright and that was God's plan all along. But this was not the way.

And if you think about it, when you back up and think about Jacob who will one day be renamed by God Israel. What does Paul say about Israel in Romans? He says they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. They have a desire for righteousness but they don't want to get righteousness God's way.

They sought to obtain their own righteousness. You go back to those wonderful three chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans. So misunderstood, especially Romans 9. But Paul's whole point is the purpose of God is one thing.

The means by which the purpose of God is obtained is another. Jesus is going to point this same thing out when he's talking about himself and John the Baptist presenting the gospel of the kingdom to Israel. He comes to the people of God and puts before them the possibility, the opportunity for the kingdom of God.

And people are going to try to take it by force. He says people are trying to press their way in to the kingdom. This goes all the way back to their forefather Jacob because Jacob sees the right thing but he wants to get it in a wrong way.

We're going to see this a few chapters hence when he wrestles with God. Jacob wrestles with God. He says I will not let you go until you bless me.

Does he get blessed on that occasion? No. We'll see this when we get there. But what is

he trying to do? What is the means of obtaining blessing from God? Loving God, obeying God, prioritizing the things of God.

This is what brings blessing in any age, in any dispensation. Walking before God, knowing His word and heeding it. That's the way to be blessed.

How does Jacob try to get the blessing? I'm going to wrestle you, I'm going to hang on to you until you bless me. What does Jacob literally walk away with after he wrestles with God? A limp. He walks away with a limp as a result of wrestling with God because this is not the way to obtain blessing.

Is wanting to be blessed by God a good thing? Sure it is. But you don't get it by force. You don't get it by your own efforts.

Wrestling is intrinsically your own effort. That's not the way to get blessing from God. God's purposes are going to be accomplished in Jacob and in his descendants.

But Jacob has a long way to go in learning the means. And he starts off on the wrong foot here. He's already limping spiritually because he's trying to obtain these things by his own efforts.

He doesn't turn to God. But how easy would it have been for Rebecca to fall down before the Lord God? Didn't she pray to God back in chapter 25 when the children were struggling within her? Didn't Isaac plead with the Lord in verse 21 of 25? Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife because she was barren. She needed something that she didn't have.

The Lord granted his plea and Rebecca conceived. The children struggled together within her and she said, if all is well, why am I like this? So she went to inquire of the Lord. What has happened to that attitude with Isaac and Rebecca over the years? Because now that the twins are full grown, Isaac is not going and inquiring of the Lord.

Lord, is my last day at hand? Should I grant the blessing? Which of my sons should I grant it to? I know that it belongs to Esau, but here's the situation. What happened to this inquiring? What happened to this pleading attitude of going to God? It has vanished. And this is going to cost the family.

This is going to divide the family like a sword. They know how to go inquire of the Lord. They know how to go plead with Him, but Isaac doesn't do it and neither does Rebecca nor does Jacob.

And this is something that's going to have to change if the blessing and if the covenant promises are going to be perpetuated in this family. So God is going to have to do some hard work in the lives of this family, and Jacob in particular. So wanting the blessing, wanting the birthright, wanting these things is good, but the means of obtaining them is

wrong.

And the key, the easiest way to discern that this is a bad thing is God is not in it. What glory to God is there in Jacob getting the birthright by doing the stew thing with Esau? God was not even involved. There's no glory of God reflected in that.

It's taking advantage of weakness. God is against those who take advantage of weakness. If you want to do a fascinating study, trace widows and orphans through the Bible.

Just get an exhaustive concordance and look up widows, look up orphans, and see what God thinks and what God does to those who take advantage of the helpless, who don't provide for them and care for them freely and willingly asking nothing in return. Bad things happen to those who don't care for those who are in need. And if you look at Esau, who has come back and is famished, you don't take advantage of them, you don't use their weakness against them, you don't barter away something from them, but that's what Jacob does.

The end is a good and desirable thing, but the means is bad. And this is something we have to watch for in our lives because this is what has happened in the church. To want the lost to be saved is a wonderful, worthy thing.

Who would not want those who are unsaved to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? It's a good thing. But the means by which many in the church seek to obtain that end is evil because they use the very same ploys that Jacob uses. They will use their desires and their weaknesses against them.

They will suck them in because they're interested in one subject and then bait and switch. They'll switch in something else now that they've got a captive audience and beat them over the head with the gospel. Here's somebody trying to fly from point A to point B. Well, let's hit them in the airport because they're vulnerable.

They can't get away. They have to wait for their plane. They're stuck there at the gate.

So let's press a tract into their hand or let's witness to them. Let's use their guilt against them. Let's work on their sense of guilt and try to convict them of their sinfulness.

Let's create in them a sense of need by beating them over the head with their guilt and with their problems. Let's appeal to their sense of need. They've got problems and they need a solution.

Let's offer them a solution to their problems. Let's present Jesus Christ as the Big Band-Aid, the great Excedrin Pill that will solve all their problems. The Bible never presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the solution to people's earthly problems.

He is the solution to their spiritual problem. He is the solution to their lack of relationship with God and that's the problem. To try to use people's problems as an entree, this is to elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way.

God the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, will convict the world of sin. It's not our job to convict the world of sin. It's not our job to make people feel guilty and to use their guilt as a lever to try to force in the gospel.

But that's what a lot of believers in the church do. To present the gospel of Jesus Christ is to present the state of things. We are lost.

We are hopeless, helpless and useless apart from Christ. And we are without hope and without God in the world. But Christ has come.

He has paid for our sins and He has made it possible to have a relationship with God. And for those who are seeking relationship with God, Jesus Christ is the way. If someone is not seeking, you can't make them into a seeker.

You can't scare them into the heavenly realms. You can't cajole them. You can't bait them.

You can't drive them with a burning torch lit from the fires of hell. All you can do is present Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit does the work in the soul.

God the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment. And no one else, certainly not us. Noble goal, wrong means.

Same thing with service and ministry in the church. Growth is a wonderful thing. Ministry is a wonderful thing.

But to try to obtain it in wrong ways, by entertainment, by providing great family fellowship and saying, well, we'll get people into the church. And we know that the word of God is important. They need to hear that word, but they are not coming because they want to hear the word.

So let's get them to come for some other reason and then they will hear the word. That's backwards. You can't bait someone in and say, if I could just get them under the sound of this good teaching, then that will fix them.

People who aren't interested, who don't come because they want to hear the word of God, are not going to listen if you do get them in the sound of that teaching. It has to start from within. It has to be the work of God the Holy Spirit confronting the individual person, whether they are an unbeliever or a believer.

And there has to be a response of asking and seeking and knocking. That's the only way the word of God, whether it's the gospel of salvation or the gospel of growth, it's only

going to be received when it is sought. And you can't make someone a seeker.

You can be there to speak the truth in love when they are seeking, when they do ask questions, but you can't change someone's mind. And to try to use a means is to become Jacob. To try to force your way into the kingdom yourself by good works or by ministry or by trying to give evidence of what a great believer you are is to become Jacob.

And it is a failure. And God will start into the discipline mode. And that's what we're going to see in the next few chapters of Genesis.

God is going to start working on Jacob. His name, some people have translated Yaakov as Chiseler. Well, God is going to start chiseling on Jacob to change him into the man that he needs to be because he is not starting off well here at all.

He has worthy goals and worthy aspirations, but the means by which he goes to obtain them is wrong, wrong, wrong. That's what we find. And yet, God is going to work through these failures.

And God is going to incorporate these into his plan. And God is, in fact, going to honor the blessing that is obtained by deceit. And God is going to acknowledge Jacob, even though he gets this in a wrong way.

And this is the amazing thing. We need to spend some time figuring this out. And that's what we're going to do when we come back from our break.

Let's pause here.