

# A Deeper Walk with God

## A Relationship with God That Doesn't Depend on Human Success

Edited Transcript

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Turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 24, Genesis chapter 24. How many of you like numbers? I love numbers. So, I don't know if I told you this before or not, but my wife said to me one day, she said, "I sure hope they have numbers in heaven." I said, "Why is that?" "Because," she said, "because if they don't, you're not going to be very happy there." So I have kept a record. I just enjoy writing down the numbers. I have written down every rep of every exercise I've ever done at the gym, and then I put them up on a shelf and I realized about a year ago, I've never actually ever looked at any of this, but I just enjoy writing it down.

I'm in a new era. I've been to the gym four times in a row now without taking any notes. Now, I'm trying to figure out what to do with these. I want to throw them away, but I just can't bring myself to do it, and so we're going to talk a little bit about the relationship between numbers and success and so forth this morning. Before we do all that, we're in this series, **A Deeper Walk With God**, and we're going to do a couple of shout-outs.

The first one goes to the "Friday Morning Huddle", up to a dozen men who've been meeting for about four and a half years at a Panera Bread, First Church of Panera Bread in Jacksonville, Florida, 6:50 on Fridays with us. Brian Peterson is the leader. He says, "The goal of this group is to provide a safe place for men to discover who they are in Christ and that God has called them to advance his kingdom with their lives." Great statement, Brian. Appreciate that.

And then our area director shout out today goes to Wayne Burroughs, area director in New York, and Wayne says, "It's a privilege to help pastors, men's leaders, disciple men wherever they are in their walk with Christ before two decades of their lives pass them by as happened to me," and so I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm rousing Man in the Mirror welcome, a big shout out to these guys this morning. One, two, three...Hoorah. Men, we are honored to have you as part of the study. Wayne, thank you for your leadership up there.

And so this morning the message is titled **A Relationship With God that Doesn't Depend on Human Success**. Let me ask you a question. So, whatever your field is, maybe it's law, so is a... If you're able to get a settlement of \$2 million and the other lawyer that's your competition, he got in his case a settlement of \$1 million, which of those two lawyers was more successful?

Or if you own a company and you have \$3 million of sales and your nearest competitor has only one and a half million dollars of sales, are you twice as good of a company? Or if you are a manager and someone else works for you, are you a better person than them because you had...? I'm an author, so if I have a book that sells 2000 copies, hopefully in a month, but 2000 copies and somebody else has a book and it sells 1000 copies, which of us is more successful?

Well, we have this humanly, we tend to talk about how well we are doing in terms of how much we have. We all know this. How is it then that God evaluates these things? And we're going to come back to some of these examples. I want to talk to you about this this morning, and we're going to begin by looking at the story of Abraham's servant in Genesis Chapter 24 so hopefully you are there.

## **THE STORY OF ABRAHAM'S SERVANT**

So, let's, first of all, look at the situation that caused this text into existence.

So, God has called this man Abram out of his homeland to go to a new place that he tells Abram he will show him along the way. And then Abraham, Abram becomes Abraham, is given a promise that he will be the father of many nations. And if you have been a Christian for a while, you may know, you probably know, I hope you know, that we are... Abraham is called the father of our faith. Abraham is called the father of our Christian faith, but Abraham got to a point where he made a huge mistake.

He was given this promise at the age of 75 years that he would have a son. He had not had a son. He was given a promise by God that he would have a son and that God would fulfill this promise. Another 10 years go by and he still hasn't that his son, and he caves, and he fathers a child with his wife's maidservant. So, they have this child, and I made some notes, I made some notes to myself, in these little bibles that you get on the... He sent Hagar and Ishmael away creating a father wound so deep that it still defines the borders and impairs the destinies of nations.

When you think about the father wound that was created there, what a huge devastating mistake he made. It is possibly the one historical fact that most effects our world today when you think about the conflict between great religions. And even so we learned here in Genesis chapter 24 that it was not the event that defined his life because it says in verse one, "Abraham was now very old and the Lord had blessed him in every way."

So if you had some major negative event in your life, something where you got it so screwed up, so fouled up that you just cannot imagine how you would ever be able to get by that, the man who did the deed that most effects our world today, probably, was still considered to be blessed by God and a man of faith. And so whatever that thing that you have done that you feel like is holding you back or defining you, that is not what defines you. That is not what defines your relationship with God. Again, it's measuring it a little bit the way that people measure human success.

All right? So, at the point in this story where we're picking up today, Abraham is a very wealthy widower who has a son, Isaac, and so in verse two he said to his senior servant, the one who is in charge of all of this stuff, "Put your hand under my thigh." That's how they were making oaths. "I want you to swear," verse three, "by the Lord, the God of Heaven and the God of Earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am loving. But will go to my country and my relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac. And then the servant asked him," and by the way, the servant is never named, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?"

And Abraham says, "Make sure that you do not take my son back there. The Lord the God of Heaven who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath saying to your offspring, 'I will give this land,'" and right there, right, right there, there's the

root, there's the root of America's supportive Israel right there. Okay? "To your offspring, I will give this land. He will send his angel before you so that you can come get a wife from my son from there."

Watch this. "If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there," so the servant took the oath and swore an oath concerning the matter. And then the servant took off for the land, and it says in a verse 12 he prayed, "Oh, Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show kindness to my master, Abraham." And so that's exactly what he prayed and that's exactly what happened. He was successful on his mission. He found a young woman who was Abraham's, his master's, brother's granddaughter.

She came out to the well and he had made a type of fleece, I guess. In his prayer, he said, "If I go there, let the woman come and offer me water and then offer to water my camels," and that's exactly what this young girl did. And so, then he went to the family of this young woman, and in a very matter of fact way told the family the story of what Abraham had instructed him to do, in just a very matter of fact way, and she ends up going with the servant and becomes the wife of Isaac.

Now, here's the question that I have for you. Was he successful on his mission? He prayed that God would give him success on his mission. Was he successful on his mission? Yes. Was his relationship with his master dependent upon whether or not the young woman said that she would go with him and therefore he would succeed in the mission? No, and so he was faithful. He was called to be faithful, to present what his master wanted to do, but he was not responsible for the outcome.

This is the big message from this text. In fact, I'll go ahead and put it up here. It's the Big Idea for the day. This is it. God does not... **God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome.** God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome, and so back to the story of the author selling a thousand books and the authors selling 2000 books, which of those two authors is more successful humanly speaking?

Well, we really don't know, do we? We don't really know because somebody who sold 2000 books who sort of bought the sales and those books end up being on the shelves of people who never read them versus the author who had a thousand books, who is following God's leading in his life and was producing a book that really brought about transformation and change in their readers. The author that sold a thousand books might be many times more effective, many times more successful, even humanly speaking than the author who sold 2000 books. The way we measure things humanly even is often askew, but let's take it a step further.

What if the author of the 1000 books had been faithful to God in how he sensed or she sensed that God was leading him to write that book? In other words, he was faithful and he sold a thousand books and then let's just say that the person who sold 2000 bucks, they were in it because they wanted to make a name for themselves, they wanted to be recognized. They wanted to be somebody and so they... And they were unfaithful in the way they did it. Which of those two authors then would be in a better relationship with God?

It's going to be the one who is not measuring their success the way that humans measure success. It's going to be someone who measures how they are doing based upon whether or not they're faithful. Hey, look, you might not have much money and somebody else might have a lot of money but your relationship with God does not depend on how much money you have. It could be that you who don't have much money don't have much money because you're never faithful with anything. Faithful

meaning, means reliable, trustworthy, dependable. You're not reliable, you're not dependable, you don't follow through, and so you haven't been faithful and that's why you don't have much money.

But guess what? There are just as many people who are extremely faithful and extremely reliable and still don't have much money. How many school teachers do we have here? How many... There's so many different professions like that, or you could have a lot of money and you could have a lot of money because you were what? Faithful. You were given five bags of gold and you turn it into 10 or you can have one bag of gold, and you can go bury it, so you could have a lot of money because you were faithful. Guess what? Can you be successful and not be faithful? Absolutely. There are lots of people out there who have lots of money who are not faithful.

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITHFULNESS AND SUCCESS**

So, next thing I wanted to talk a little bit about is just this difference between faithfulness and success. I guess we're already talking about it, aren't we? Is there a correlation between faithfulness and success? Sometimes. It depends. We've just been talking about it. Sometimes people have a lot of money and they're faithful. Sometimes people have a lot of money and they're not faithful.

Sometimes people don't have a lot of money, don't have a lot of human success, and they're not faithful. Sometimes though they are, but there is often a correlation, but it's just such a mistake. It's just such a mistake to think that our relationship with God in some way depends on human success. It does not. It is a false narrative. There is a, especially in America, I'm just telling it like it is here, but especially in America where we have a prosperity Gospel that just kind of underpins everything, it just basically is, if you really love God enough, if you really love God, if you really had enough faith, he will bless you brother! Can I get an amen?

Nowhere else in the world is this... Well, there are a few places in the world, but this is such a minority kind of way of thinking about Christianity. So, sometimes there is a connection between them and they are not mutually exclusive. They're not mutually exclusive. In general, the more faithful you are, then you can expect God's blessing, but it may not come as dollar signs. It may come as the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension. It may come in the beauty of your relationships that you had these deep, almost inconceivably deep, relationships with other people. So what is your... how have you written your success narrative?

Maybe, maybe this is something you want to process a little bit. So, I may have mentioned this before, I can't remember where I say what anymore. It's interesting, I told my wife a couple of weeks ago, I said, "It's a shame I have to die. I'm just starting to get the hang of it." Two and a half years ago, I decided to go on a Facebook fast. I decided to go on his six-month Facebook fast. Let me tell you why. Because I didn't like what it was doing to me, and what I was doing is I was writing like devotionals or meditations and so forth, so I wasn't posting pictures of what I had for breakfast or something like that.

Nobody cares what I had for breakfast anyway. You know what the difference between being famous and made a celebrity is? You're not a celebrity until people want to know what you had for breakfast. Once people start wanting to know what you had for breakfast, then you're a celebrity, but you can be famous and nobody would... See, well anyway, that'd make you nervous. I think about these things. So I was on Facebook and I was doing these really daily posts. I've got, I looked the other day just because I was curious, because I like numbers.

I have 135 pages, a single pace, single space posts, like five or six posts per page, so five or six posts times 135, whatever that is. I have a... I posted a lot of these little devotions on Facebook, but here's what was going on. I would make a post and I would get X number of likes and I would feel pretty good. The next day, I would make a post and I would get 1.5X likes and I was like soaring. I'd say like, "Wow, I feel so good right now," and then the next day I would put on a post and I would get 0.5X likes, and I would be moping around all day long like nobody loves me, nobody likes me.

I just didn't like what it was doing to me, and so I said, "I've got to do something about it," so I decided to go on a six-month Facebook fast, two and a half years ago. Now I've done a few posts from time to time, but I basically had decided I'm not going back. I just, for me, I can't do it because it draws me into a human success syndrome, and it affects my relationship with God. I'm not saying what anybody else should do, but the way that I'm wired, it just brought me down and I was measuring success based on particular outcomes, not on whether or not I had been faithful to do what God led me to do.

I was being faithful on the post that I was writing because I really did sense the Lord had led me to do these little things, but I got turned around, and I think we can get turned around, and that's why I wanted to have this little talk with you today. This is, this Big Idea today is so important. **God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome.** I first learned this principle in the middle of my big seven-year long business crisis. I developed Tampa Commons over in Tampa at the corner of Dale Mabry and Kennedy. It's a 13-story building, 250,000 square feet, huge floor plan, and we put in a savings and loan association and they went belly up.

Low and behold, I don't know how God allowed it, but I was able, we were able, to go out and do a deal with Time Warner Communications to put them in that space. It was like a third of the space or something, I forget, but I didn't have the money to do the tenant improvements, and so I went to our lender who really owned the building, I didn't really own the building. As it turns out, they own the building, because they bossed me around and told me what to do all the time. It felt like they owned the building, and so I went to our lender and I asked them for the dollars, it was a lot of money. It was \$3 million and we needed \$3 million to retrofit this space to put them in there.

Anyway \$3 million. It might as well be a billion. So, I went to the lender and I started negotiating for the money and the guy who ran the commercial lending department, he started dressing me down. "It's your fault this happened." Yeah, it's my fault. Okay, yeah, we're in a big economic downturn. Yeah, right. That's my bad. Sorry, I made this happen all by myself. Anyway, he's just ripping me up one side and down the other. Finally, when he was all done, I said to him, I said, "Ted," I said, "I am not responsible for what happened in this building. I'm only responsible to be faithful, to try to do something about it."

Well, you would have think, you would've thought that I had just pressed the switch on the point in the overturn for Nuclear Holocaust. He absolutely came unglued and he was screaming at me on the phone, "I can't believe that you would say you're not responsible. You have to take personal responsibility for this. You're the one who made this happen," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I almost walked away from this big idea that day, but I held my ground. I said, and I explained to him what I'm trying to explain to you, that my job is to be faithful, to do everything that I can humanly do.

I am not responsible if that outcome goes to the left or to the right. That, and I told him the same thing, I said, "That's in the hands of God. That's in the hands of God," and this has liberated, this has liberated me ever since. We teach this to all of our area director, all of our area directors who are listening today or have ever listened, they know this, this idea. God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular

outcome. And if you have been measuring human success, your success, your happiness, if you have allowed your joy to be somehow linked to, connected with, dependent upon human success, then I hope that you will be able to grasp this idea this morning and really make it your own, really believe that it's true.

Basically nothing really happens in life unless we fully understand and truly believe in the idea. Belief determines behavior. What else determines behavior? I mean, somebody can put a gun to your head and force you to walk in and give them your valuables, but generally speaking, belief determines behavior. If you believe this, it really can have a tremendous impact on how you live your life.

#### **FOUR WAYS TO CREATE THE HIGHEST LIKELIHOOD OUR FAITHFULNESS WITH SUCCEED**

Okay, final thing, I want to give you four ways that you can create the greatest likelihood or the highest likelihood that if you are faithful that you will succeed. We get these back in Abram's story. So, in verse 10 it said, "Then this servant took 10 of his master's camels and left, taking them with him, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master." So, the first thing that we see is that if you want to have a... If you want to be faithful and see that be successful, don't go off half-cocked. Do your homework, make a plan, gather the resource but don't go off half-cocked.

So, I'm not even sure if this is related, but I had a... So, I was at the gym, because I was talking about the gym earlier, at the gym a few years ago. I was responding to the normal definition of human success at the gym, and so I was trying to lift more and more and more and more, and I was. I was lifting body weight and different things and stuff like that, but I was getting injured all the time. I was getting injured all the time. Hey, I'm not a young guy, okay? And so a guy who had been an Olympian told me one day, he said, and he didn't know about any of the problems I was having, he just said, "You know, if you really want to build your endurance and a few other things," he said, "it's a good idea to lower the weight you're lifting, increase the number of reps."

He said the ideal number of reps, I don't know if it's true or not, this is what he said, was 25 reps. So, for the last few years, what I've done is I do a set, instead of trying to do the most weight I can do and do six reps, I lower the weight and I do a 25 rep sets. If I can't do 25, then the next time I lower the weight until I can do 25 reps. That's worked really well for me, and here's the benefit is that I've not had any injuries, any injuries that I'm aware of, over these last several years. So, the bottom line is, is that I didn't go off... I've stopped going off half-cocked. I've stopped looking at things the way, the normal way, of looking at things, and I've had a good result.

The second way to create the highest likelihood that your faithfulness would succeed, it says, "He set out," continuing in verse 10, "He set out to the town of Nahor," and he had all of these goods from his master and he apparently had some servants of his own that went with him, so don't go off half-cocked is number one. Number two is do what's going to give you the highest likelihood of success. That makes sense. So, Proverbs says, "A gift ushers the giver into the presence of the great." Did you know that, the Proverbs say that, that a gift ushers the giver into the presence of the great, and so he put together some gifts for example.

The other thing, he didn't sit around in his hometown and ring his hands and hope that somehow a woman would appear to become the wife of his master's son. He actually went out and tried to make the sale. He went to where he might possibly find the woman. He went to the land where the woman

might be. And so don't go off half-cocked, but then do the things that are going to give you the most likelihood of succeeding. And then third, and I love this part of it the best I think, is to pray.

Verse 12, "Then he prayed, 'Oh Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show me... Show kindness to my master Abraham,'" and then when he found the young woman in Verse 26, "Then the man bowed down and worshiped the lord to offer the prayer." So, don't go off half-cocked. Give yourself... Do those things that will give yourself the highest likelihood of success. Pray, and then from verses 33 to 50, do everything in a matter of fact way. You don't have to supercell, you don't have to hype it up. You don't have to fudge your numbers. You don't have to make claims that aren't true. Just be very matter of fact.

When we started the area director initiative at Man in the Mirror, whatever it was, eight years ago, we decided that we would use the approach of Abraham's servant. We fasted and prayed for three weeks, and then we just decided that what we would do is we would tell people what we thought that God had called us to do in a very matter of fact way without a lot of emotion, without a lot of superlatives, and without hyping everything up. And then we would tell them the story and then we would say, "So this is what we think the Lord is calling us to do. Would you like to help? Tell us now so we'll know whether to go to the right or to the left."

Now we have over a hundred of these men around the country, but, and I love the number, I love the number, but the point of it all is, is that the way we approached it was the way that Abraham's servant approached it. The way we approached success on our mission, our mission and looking for success innovation was the way that Abraham has done in this passage. I commend it to you too, and the best way that I can think of to remember the way of Abraham's servant is the Big Idea for the day, and it's this, that **God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome**. You with me?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the story of Abraham's servant. So many lessons here, we could probably take that that chapter and do numerous, numerous messages, but this is the message today, Lord, that you don't measure success the way that humans do. You manage your success by whether or not we're faithful and our relationship with you does not depend on the way that humans define success, but our relationship with you is really connected to being faithful so that we hear "Well done, good," and not "Well done, good and successful servant, but well done, good and faithful servant." So, help us to be faithful, help us to remember this idea that you do not call us to produce a particular outcome. You call us to be faithful. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.