

*Series: Gleanings in Genesis*  
**“Shortcuts to Happiness: The False Promise of Instant Results”**

**Scripture text: Genesis 25:29-26:34**

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Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA

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Last week in this series in Genesis, God revealed that he had a plan for the lives of Jacob and Esau since before their birth. We saw how God’s sovereign hand, his election, and his mercy and grace were on display in both their lives.

This morning, we will see the contrast between Esau and his father, Isaac.

Let’s turn to Genesis 25:29-26:35:

**Esau Sells His Birthright**

Gen. 25:29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore, his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” 32 Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” 33 Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

**God’s Promise to Isaac**

Gen. 26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

**Isaac and Abimelech**

Gen. 26:6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance. 8 When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. 9 So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’” 10 Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” 11 So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

Gen. 26:12 And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, 13 and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. 14 He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. 15 (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) 16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

Gen. 26:17 So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. 18 And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. 19 But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, 20 the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek because they contended with him. 21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. 22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Gen. 26:23 From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Gen. 26:26 When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, 27 Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. 32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." 33 He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

### **Esau Marries Hittite women**

Gen. 26:34 When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, 35 and they **made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.**

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. [Is. 40:8]*

Let's pray together.

Now as we begin, I want to encourage you to take a glance down at the overall structure of the passage and see how this passage is structured. You'll notice that there are two short sections about Esau on each end of our passage. The first is Genesis 25:29-34. The last is at the end (just verses 34 and 35). And in both, Esau demonstrates his priorities.

First, we will read that Esau despises his birthright, and the second we'll see that Esau is marrying pagan Hittite women. Sandwiched in-between these two accounts, we will see the life of his father Isaac, faithfully obeying God in the midst of extreme hardship. Taking the long and difficult path.

*And in this passage, we will see that God teaches that **living by faith in him is far better than the false hope of momentary comfort.***

And therefore, God is calling us to: **refuse the lure of instant gratification, respond obediently his calling, and rely on God's better provision.**

### **1. Refuse the Lure of Instant Gratification**

I read a poster that said, "Hard work always pays off after time, but laziness always pays off right now." The quote is meant to be funny, but it actually illustrates a reality in us. We all tend to prefer things right now rather than later.

When ordering an item online, how often do we pick the slowest delivery option? If the cost is the same, don't we often pick the faster delivery time?

Do you prefer to sleep in on Saturday morning, or do you get up and go to the gym? Many of us can tend to prefer the easier path. The instant payoff rather than the reward of hard, long-term work.

One author writes, "Instant gratification is the desire for immediate reward, even at the expense of long-term gain. Our brains are wired for it. Dopamine is released in anticipation of rewards, which helps explain why we crave the next scroll, snack or splurge. While these impulses offer immediate pleasure, they can also distract us from more meaningful long-term wins.

Psychologists refer to this as 'present bias.' It's when we overvalue the now and undervalue the future when making decisions."<sup>1</sup>

The examples I have just given may seem insignificant, but we can think of many other areas of life where we can tend to overvalue the here and now and undervalue the future.

### ***Esau's short-term focus:***

And as we look at Esau's life in this chapter, we see this principle at work.

Esau chooses immediate satisfaction and does not consider the future. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, he put himself first.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2025/07/02/how-instant-gratification-hinders-success-and-what-to-do-instead/>

In the text, we see that he arrives home famished after what we imagine was a long day of hunting. When he saw the red lentil stew that Jacob was making, he demanded it from him: “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!”

Jacob, seeing Esau’s desperate mindset, takes advantage of the situation and offers the food only in exchange for Esau’s birthright.

Esau, so rash and reckless, states that he is going to die of hunger or exhaustion. If he doesn’t eat soon, the birthright would be meaningless. But Jacob stays firm and makes him swear an oath. And Esau did.

The text says, “He ate, drank, and rose and went his way.” Commentators explain that the Hebrew seems to indicate that Esau gulped down or swallowed down the food. He comes across as a wild beast of a man, recklessly charging in from the hunt, demanding food at any cost. Gulping down his food and then probably heading off to bed to fall asleep. The passage is short, but it gives a clear picture.

Perhaps you’ve read this passage before, and you’ve felt like the greater sin fell to Jacob for being so merciless and cunning. And while Jacob was not sinless here, the narration makes it clear that the true crime was Esau’s. For he forsakes his birthright. He didn’t care about God’s promises and blessings. He only wanted food, and he wanted it then and there. Having explained the account, the narrator explains what has just happened for us saying, “***Thus, Esau despised his birthright.***”

This final statement seals the deal. Esau wasn’t just reckless. It wasn’t just a moment of weakness. Esau was focused on the here and now, rather than on God’s promises. His god was his belly. He traded lentils for God’s covenant promises.

Promises which are of eternal and limitless value. Promises that would one day be paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. These are the promises that Esau despised.

The author of the book of Hebrews leaves no room for confusion when we read him say:

See to it ... <sup>16</sup> that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup> For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. [Heb. 12:15-17]

Esau’s choice wasn’t innocent. It was a godless choice, and though he regretted it later, it was too late. He choose wickedly.

And the pattern repeats when he at the end of this chapter Esau again rejects God’s covenant stipulations by marrying not only one but two Hittite women who were not part of God’s covenant people.

He not only made life bitter for his parents, but he in essence joined himself with women who worshipped false gods, and in so doing again despised God and his promises, thus suffering the consequences of his decisions.

Impulsive and instant gratification apart from God often appear to offer great promise, but they always fall short. They, like fools' gold, appear to be precious, but are nothing but bitterness.

***So, may we refuse to be lured by momentary comfort in place of God's eternal promises.***

For God calls us to trust in him instead of the shortcuts this world has to offer.

## **2. Respond obediently – even when it is confusing**

As we come into this next portion of our passage, we turn to the life of Isaac.

Far from chasing the false promises of instant gratification, we see that in faith, he responded obediently to God's call to a much harder path. And we will look at that now.

### ***Abraham responds to famine***

Now, this section of Scripture begins with the context. It says, "*Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham.*" [Genesis 26:1]

Even as we are being told about the famine in the land, we are immediately reminded that this was not the first famine Isaac's family had dealt with. Isaac's father, Abraham, had also gone through a severe famine.

And it seems that this detail is given to us so that we might think back to the previous famine and observe how Abraham handled it.

For in Genesis 12, right after God established his covenant with Abraham, a severe famine hit. Abraham's response is important: even though God had just promised that he would provide for him, Abraham did not wait on the Lord's provision. Instead, he went down to Egypt to provide for himself and put his family at risk – God having to save Sarah from the Pharaoh who had taken her for himself. Abraham faced a famine and trusted in himself.

The passage brings this to mind, and we wonder, what will Isaac do? Will he follow in his father's footsteps?

### ***Isaac responds to famine***

We read that God appeared to Isaac and told him ***not*** to go down to Egypt, but to live in Gerar and that doing so, God would be with him and would bless him.

God called Isaac to obey. And he reminds him that along with the call to obey, he also offered him covenant promises.

He had made a covenant promise with Abraham, and his descendants, and now also now directly to Isaac and his descendants.

He said,

“I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

The Lord is telling Isaac very clearly: though he is fully aware that there is a famine in the land, Isaac is not to do what Abraham did when there was famine – he is not to go to Egypt. Egypt was where Abraham went to provide for himself. But here the Lord says: “*Do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land that I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you....*”

God will be the provider.

And Isaac listened to Him, even though probably everything within him was saying to do the opposite.

I mean if we put ourselves in his shoes, we’re not talking about a small shortage here, we’re talking about famine. That would be a big deal, especially in arid lands.

A famine could very likely be due to little to no rainfall. And living in a dry climate like Gerar, the natural instinct would be to go to Egypt where at least the Nile River could water the vegetation. That would be a sure thing, and you could at least buy food. It would be a perfect way to survive a famine.

So, here’s Isaac, with his family— his wife and children—and God is calling him to do something that is not only difficult but seems to contradict logic.

Why would God want him to stay in the land of Gerar when there was nearby a place with such great wealth and food?

What we see here is God calling Isaac to respond to Him by obediently staying in Gerar, trusting God’s guidance over his own instincts.

And in contrast with the unfaithfulness of Esau, we see that Isaac is faithful. He obeys. He trusts God’s wisdom and calling.

### ***Isaac’s struggles even in obedience***

And at this point, even though Isaac obediently follows God’s command to stay away from Egypt and remain in Gerar, he still faces temptations and struggles.

We see here that God’s path is not the easy path.

Jesus didn't say, "follow me and I will make you healthy and wealthy." He said, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" [Matthew 16:24.]

He also told his disciples, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." [John 16:33]

And how we see the truth of that in this passage. Throughout this chapter Isaac faces a number of challenges. First, he is faced with fear over losing his wife to the King of Gerar. God graciously spares them all from the King.

But the trials don't stop there. And after all, there is still a famine, and they need water. In a famine, water can be scarce. In a very dry land, water is like gold.

And when Isaac began to dig new wells, he faced more trials and struggles from the locals. They claimed the water as theirs.

So, he moved on, dug another well and found water again. And again, the locals fought with Isaac, and claimed the water was theirs. Imagine the struggles, imagine the frustration, of having found water and then someone else claiming it after you had done the hard work.

Then finally, on the third attempt, Isaac's men dug a well, found water, and no one quarreled over it. They called it Rehoboth.

When we read these passages, we often don't get a full sense of all that these families had to go through. But here we can see how much it cost Isaac to obey God's calling. And yet, amid all these trials he continued to obey God.

He does not abandon the place. He did not give up on God's plan. He persevered, trusting that the Lord's way was the best way. And as we see in the passage, God honored his obedience and provided for him.

#### *Famines in today?*

Now, we don't often face famines. But it is true that God often calls us to do things that are difficult and perhaps even confusing.

The fourth commandment calls us to rest from our work and labors on his holy day. And then God calls us to give 10%, and even more, of what we have to him. While the world around us thrives financially, this might seem counter intuitive. We already get taxed by the government. We sacrifice to have our children in Christian schools, and on top of all that, God calls us to trust him with our tithes and offerings.

We are commanded to speak the truth. We are not to lie; we are to avoid dishonest gain and not speak evil of others.

In many situations, this means we give information to people who could use it to hurt us. While we could lie and get out of certain circumstances, or get ahead by exaggerating numbers, or take advantage of certain situations, we are called to holy and truthful living. And at times it can feel helpless when people all around us are lying and cheating and getting ahead or avoiding consequences.

On a regular basis, I hear about Christians who are taking pay cuts to serve the Lord.

Just last week I learned of someone who, hearing God's call to teach, is leaving his lucrative job, to take on a teaching job at a Christian institution where he will be receiving a 50% pay decrease.

I talked with someone else by phone this week who joyfully took a job on the mission field that was a 75% pay decrease.

It is not all financial. God calls us to love and serve our neighbors and to pray for those who persecute us. Even when they hate us and threaten us. God calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God, rather than looking out for ourselves. To give up our time, our comfort, and our resources for others.

God's way is not the easy way. It is the narrow way. The faithful response, the faithful action, and obedience to God often means doing the more difficult thing, taking the more confusing path that God calls you too. Laying down your life for the Kingdom of God.

Faithful living is a call to live not by what is seen but by what is unseen. And when we obey God, and trust in his promises, we live by faith in him.

So we refuse the lure, we respond in obedience and now finally we rely on God's better provision.

### **3. Rely on God's better provision**

As we look at the life of Isaac, it could be tempting to think of God's calling on his life as God in some ways preventing him from a full and happy life.

Perhaps we sometimes wonder why God doesn't just put his people in a perfect place, without trials, famines, sickness and difficulty. Why go through all the troubles and trials?

For ourselves, we often can think, happiness is just barely out of reach. If only I had \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), life would be different.

Theologically we might know that is not accurate, but in practice, do we sometimes live this way? That if we just could get \_\_\_\_\_ taken care of in our lives! Then...then I would be so much happier.

- For some of our youth, I can imagine that happiness comes in a package that contains independence from parents, a successful career, and a spouse. If only they had *that*, life would be so much better.

- For some of our adults, the happiness package *might* contain marriage, and it might contain marriage, plus a child. If you have boys, it is having that little girl. If you have girls, it is having that little boy.
- For other adults, happiness is just on the other side of a promotion, financial freedom or financial success.
- For others still, happiness means *feeling better* - getting through a sickness or illness.
- Still for others, it is vacation, retiring or having grandkids.

If you study different cultures, you'll quickly find out that happiness is conceptualized in vastly different ways.

For the Latino culture, happiness is sought in family and community. Families try to live together in big houses, nearby.

In American cultures, while family and community are important, happiness is generally sought through personal achievement and success. Property, financial freedom and success become life goals.

The list goes on and on. One thing is for sure – happiness is constantly moving further from us. It is elusive.

All these things, while good things, are *not ultimate things*. They are not enough. They do not bring the happiness we long for. They are only attempts at happiness. Shortcuts to happiness, but they offer false promises.

When we seek happiness in these things we seek happiness in the gift rather than the giver. The created, rather than the Creator.

And so, when we consider this passage, we must not see it as a how-to-guide on how to get rich with God's help.

A lot of our lives seem built around the idea that if we do good, we will receive good. That if we work hard enough, we can avoid misfortune and hardship. Somehow, if we do the right things at the right time, we'll be happy. We will avoid discomfort. We will be blessed.

But the life of Isaac shows us something different.

Even when you follow God in this world and in this lifetime, you will continue to face hardships.

Isaac listened to God's call. He stayed in Gerar and worked hard. He actively sought to make it work, even if he struggled a little to trust God. Overall, he was seeking to be faithful to God's calling on his life.

And what we see is that not everything goes well. Isaac struggles. Rebekah struggles. The family struggles. Even the servants, no doubt, struggled as they tried to figure out why they are staying in a desert place when there were far better locations to live in - far better ways to succeed in life.

Yet as we continue to read the story, we see that although there are struggles, as Isaac remains steadfast in trusting in God, something changes.

We see a point in the passage where the Lord blesses Isaac far beyond anyone's imagination, even in a time of famine! He becomes wealthier and wealthier to the point that the king of Gerar comes to him and asks for a treaty because it is evident to all that God is with him. He becomes overwhelmingly rich—more than he could have ever imagined.

And yet that is not what this passage is about. This passage doesn't make us smile because Isaac is so overwhelmingly rich.

We know that riches come and go. We know that the wealthiest people on earth, leave it all behind when they die.

We smile not because he was rich, but because God showed him that *God was enough*. He showed Isaac and his family that in the middle of a dry, dry desert, in the middle of a famine, with people trying to disenfranchise him, God provided so much that he was overflowing with blessings.

God didn't just give him one well, but then two and then three and more and more. The people of the land couldn't believe it. They knew that God was with him.

And that is the greatest provision. That God is our better provision. He is our greatest reward. He is ours and we are his.

And we see here that God is in the business of showing his children that *he* is their great reward. Not the things. Money, land, success, children and grandchildren are wonderful. But God – he is our true treasure. He is the great pearl. He is our greatest reward.

### ***Conclusion***

So in conclusion, as we look to the future, may we refuse and flee the temptation of counterfeit happiness in the things of this world, and may we respond obediently to God's calling to live in faith and obedience to his calling, knowing that as do and as we rely in God as our provider and our provision, *in him* we will find true happiness and joy. Amen.

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