

Life Application Principles from People of the Book of Genesis

by Dr. David A. DeWitt

Adam

1. Our origin determines our significance (Genesis 1:26-27).

It is important to understand our origin and our destiny. We will only understand our significance when we can accurately answer the questions, Where did we come from? and Where are we going? The three other basic life questions, Who are we? Why are we here? and Are we significant? are framed in the context of the first two. Genesis provides us with a specific account of our origin. The Bible begins focusing on our origin in chapters 1 and 2 and our destiny in chapter 3. I seriously doubt if you will have long-term success growing in Christ if you do not have an accurate understanding of your origin and your destiny. For example, suppose you believe you evolved from lower life forms over millions of years (atheism) or you are a collection of spiritual energy who will eventually become one with the god-force of the universe (pantheism). These concepts of origin will give you a very different view of your significance than being created in the image of a sovereign God.

2. We are spiritual creatures (Genesis 1:26-29; 2:7 and 15-17).

We are not highly evolved animals. God breathed into us a spiritual nature. That tells us several things about ourselves: (1) we have the capacity to make decisions beyond our instincts, (2) we were created with a sense of purpose and destiny, and (3) we possess creativity. None of these attributes can be found in any animals of any kind. So we must understand that we can keep commandments and we do not have the option of operating without a sense of creativity, purpose and destiny, and significance. So everything human beings do—be it education, politics, business, family, community, or whatever—they do creatively and in the context of spiritual theological thoughts about their purpose and destiny. There is no such thing as a court of law or a public school which does not decide and teach some religious prejudice.

3. We were created with autonomy (Genesis 1:26-27).

Man was not created in a community. God only created one man, not a community of them. The only thing “not good” about man’s autonomy was that he needed a woman. But God never said it was not good that he didn’t have a community. A community can have tremendous value, but the heroes of Genesis—and most of the Bible—were men and women who stood individually autonomously apart from their community. Consider, for example, the lives of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul. What community were they accountable to? Godly communities formed around godly individuals for worship, prayer, teaching, and fellowship (Acts 2:42), but the community is never seen as the source of righteousness. Accountability to a group of humans may bring your chaos into the order defined by the group, but only accountability to God brings godliness. Favor with God comes not to those who conform to a social community but to those who “overcome” the sins of it (Revelation 2:7, 17, 26; 3:4, 5, 12, 21). When we stand before Christ in judgment, it will be as an individual giving account for what he or she did with his or her own individual autonomy (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

4. We were created to work (Genesis 2:15-23).

Adam was given the purpose of work before the fall. Before he sinned, in his perfect state, he was to cultivate the garden and name the animals. Eve was created to be a helper suitable for Adam. If a man is not working, he will not feel, or be, complete. And if a woman is not helping her man, she will not feel, or be, complete. There is no biblical basis for retirement. If a man is not working in a substantial job, he will be unbalanced. The same goes for a woman working at something other than helping her husband.

5. We were created in a hierarchy (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:20-23).

Adam and Eve were created in submission to God. The animals were in submission to Adam and Eve. There is even a sense in which the plants were in submission to the humans and the animals (Genesis 1:29-31). But unlike the animals, God did not create Adam and Eve at the same time. For it was Adam who was created first and then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13). Eve was to be a helper suitable for Adam. As the Apostle Paul said, I want you to understand that Christ

is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ...For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9). So men, women, animals, and even plants, were created to function within a hierarchy in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. The man was the initiator and the woman was the responder.

6. The husband will "rule over" the wife (Genesis 3:16).

With sin came the Fall and the curse, and both were a perversion of the original creation. The hierarchy was still in place, but now the man is to rule over the woman, who apparently desires to rule over him (compare Genesis 3:16 and 4:7). So God established submission. (Of course, submission is ultimately to God, so no one is to submit to someone asking them to sin.) "Mutual submission" is a contradiction in terms. It's an oxymoron. When Paul says, and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:22), he never ever defined that mutually. He defined it clearly in the next verses as the church to Christ, wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters (Ephesians 5:23-6:9).

But notice the hierarchy God set up after the Fall was one of submission as you look toward the one you are responsible to. But the responsibility for someone is never described as dictatorship but headship (Ephesians 5:23). The difference is clear. The head is inseparably connected to the body. If the body dies, the head dies. If the body is sick or suffers, so does the head. So hierarchy viewed from one way is submission but viewed from the other way, it's responsible headship not disconnected dictatorship.

7. Because of sin, man was cursed to do work which had no lasting value (Genesis 3:17-19).

Work is not part of the curse. The curse made work: (1) hard (i.e., toil), (2) necessary, and (3) without lasting value. Because of sin, we have to work hard to survive, yet we will not survive. Our work has utilitarian value—it puts food on the table—but it has no real value. Five hundred years from now, it will all amount to nothing. We are dust, and to dust we shall return.

8. We are creatures with a moral conscience (Genesis 2:17; 3:7-11 and 22).

Genesis 1 and 2 tells us about our origin. Genesis 3 tells us something about our destiny. Before the Fall, man was a spiritual being, i.e., with a sense of purpose, destiny, and creativity, but with the Fall he became a creature destined to struggle with sin until he died. He was now a moral being—knowing good and evil. The forbidden fruit gave Adam and Eve a conscience which convicted them, and us, about good and evil. However, because of our sin nature, and some social/cultural background, our conscience (like everything else about us) is tainted. So we should: (1) follow our conscience, (2) be constantly conforming our conscience to the Word of God, and (3) never let anyone else dictate the direction of our conscience.

Therefore, we now have a capacity to think in terms of morality, as well as purpose, destiny, and creativity. But it is also true that we are unable to operate without morality—a knowledge of good and evil governed by our conscience. So everything human beings do—be it in education, politics, business, family, community, or whatever—they do based on their morality. Therefore, putting this together with principle #2, we can conclude that every human being is religious and every human activity is a religious activity. The church, the school, the business, and the courtroom are all places of religious activity.

9. Sin gives us less control of our future (Genesis 3:16-17).

When we sin, we disagree with God about what's in our own best interest. We determine that God does not have our best interest in mind when He gave us our current life situation. So our sin nature says we need to violate His commands or His character or His expectations to accomplish that which is in our best interests. It is an attempt to steer our present and future situation by disobeying God.

The problem is, God did have our best interest in mind when He gave us our present life situation. That's the case whether it be wealth or poverty, health or sickness, a good spouse or a bad one, obedient children or rebels. And, it is the parameter of godliness that gives us control over our future. Every time we sin—as was the case with Adam and Eve—we have less control over our future. That's more obvious with some sins like drunkenness, substance abuse, and foolish gambling. But it's just as true with adultery, gossip, lying, borrowing money, and seeking revenge. For example, if you divorce your husband or wife, you will no longer be able to effectively parent your children.

On the other hand, righteousness increases our control of the future. For example, givers have the most real authority in every situation. Truth sets you free. Faithfulness to your spouse allows you to parent your children. Lack of debt gives financial freedom. If you don't think about revenge, you will see the situation more clearly.

Eve

10. You will either conform your desires to the truth or you will conform the truth to fit your desires (Genesis 3:1-6).

Eve had a discussion with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Interestingly, we aren't told the serpent was Satan until the book of Revelation (Revelation 12:9 and 20:2). So it seems that all through the Old and New Testaments, neither the patriarchs or prophets or apostles knew Eve was tempted by Satan. It's only revealed to the Apostle John near the end of his life and near the end of the Bible. Anyway, the focus in Genesis 3 is not on the devil but on Eve. The serpent is involved in five verses (3:1-5). After that, we never hear of him again in Genesis. Apparently, Eve didn't know that animals didn't talk, so conversation was not surprising to her. Her understanding of the command of God was clear. We read, And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die'" (verses 2-3). But the serpent convinced Eve to look at her desires rather than the truth commanded by God. Eve was faced with the reality of the desirable characteristics of the fruit. Not only was it good for food and a delight to the eyes, but it was desirable to make one wise. So now she had to decide to either focus on God has said (3:3) and conform her desires to the truth or focus on Satan's indeed has God said ...? (3:1) and conform the truth to fit her desires. She took the second path, the path of sin.

We face the same challenge as we observe, interpret, and apply the Word of God. For about 2000 years, the serious conservative church leadership believed the Bible to say "no" to things like divorce and remarriage, mutual submission, women's leadership over men, borrowing money, and the acceptance of homosexuality. Now we aren't so sure the Bible condemns these things. Why? Has the truth changed? Have we conformed the truth to our desires? We have to be careful of that with our doctrine and moral preferences, too. Someone once told me, "All pastors only have three sermons." Is it time that we see things the way we usually see them, in conformity to the way we want to see them?

In the past—before "the enlightenment" or at least before the year 1800 and the era of modernism, desires were considered something to be controlled. Since 1800, desires have increasingly been seen as something to be served, fed, cultivated, and developed. Meanwhile, truth has come to be seen as relative and values expedient. So the influence of modern and post-modern world will be to conform the truth to your desires. But remember, the godly response is always to conform your desires to the truth. You will do (or are doing) one or the other. Which is it?

11. When we sin, we decide that God does not have our best interest in mind and that we are better at determining what's in our own best interest (Genesis 3:6).

The serpent convinced Eve that her best interests were served not by God's commands but by her own discretion. Eve decided that she, not God, should determine what's in her own best interest. She decided that a woman had a right to choose what was in her own best interest. Adam, of course, also decided he could do the same. God will, of course, do what serves His own glory. But to participate in that is what is in our best interest. Sin is to decide that's not so. It says that in this particular area, in this specific temptation, I know best what is in my own best interest.

Cain and Abel

12. Both attitudes and actions are important (Genesis 4:3-7).

We know of no instructions given to Cain or Abel before they presented their offerings. Afterwards, though, God gave specific commands and revealed what His expectations were all along. Then He told Cain to make the corrections necessary.

We should not:

- (a) Disobey a command of God
- (b) Disappoint an expectation of God
- (c) Disregard a new understanding about God

—Genesis 4:3-7

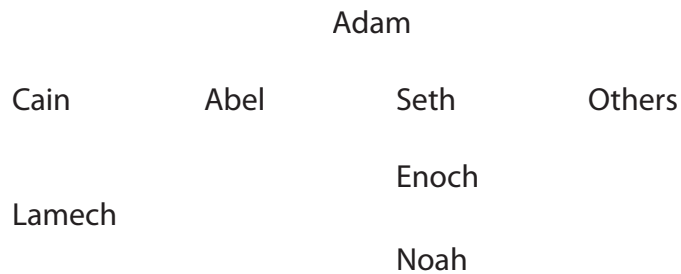
In other words:

- (a) Our attitude is important (Hebrews 11:4)
- (b) Our actions are important (Genesis 4:10)
- (c) Our corrections are important (Genesis 4:7)

Real morality is based in motives. But only God can judge motives. We don't even know our own motives, let alone those of others. It's hard to work on our motives, but we can work on our actions. Alcoholics' Anonymous has a saying, "Fake it until you make it." God told Cain, You must master it. Master your actions, and let God judge your attitudes.

Lamech

13. Prosperity, artistic talent, and creative ingenuity are not to be equated with the blessings of God (Genesis 4:19-22).



Two family lines are described as coming from Adam. One from Cain and one from Seth. These are probably the sons of God (Seth) and the daughters of men (Cain) in Genesis 6. Cain is cursed by God for killing his brother Abel. Nothing spiritually positive is even said about his line. But the fifth descendent of Cain is emphasized in Genesis 4. His name was Lamech, and he was the first polygamist—he took to himself two wives (4:19). Their children were (apparently) the first beduion shepherds, the first noted musicians, and forgers of all implements of bronze and iron (4:20-21). There is no indication that this people ever called on God or gave Him credit for His creative abilities. This is the line God cursed, yet they are noted for their creative and technological advances. The movie Amadeus asks the question, Why would God put all that musical talent in a morally insensitive man like Mozart? We often ask, or think, why has God blessed those liberal pagans of Silicon Valley with all the creative talent? Why did God gift so many homosexuals in the area of the arts? What makes us think He did? In Genesis 4, it's the cursed line, not the godly line, that is prosperous, creative artistically talented, and industrially accomplished. Sure, God blessed Abraham and His people Israel with physical earthly blessings when they obeyed. But that's not to say all earthly prosperity is a blessing of God. Short-term earthly prosperity and creative talent can abound in godless people.

Seth

14. To walk with God is a choice (Genesis 4:26 and 5:24).

In contrast to the Cain line, Genesis 5 presents the Seth line. When Seth is born to Adam, he is called in his own likeness, according to his image. When Seth has a son, we read for the first time, then men began to call upon the name of the Lord. The fifth descendent from Seth is Enoch. Of him we read, And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. God nowhere left us with any record of any command or exhortation for people to call upon His name or walk with Him. But the Seth line decided to do that. It should be no surprise that out of this line came Noah, a righteous man, blameless in his time. Noah walked with God (6:9). To walk with God is a choice.

Noah

15. The righteousness we are to pursue does not require a righteous society (Genesis 6:1-8, 22; 7:5).

Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him, in the midst of people described as every intent of the thought of their heart was only evil continually (6:5). Most of the heroes of the Bible lived for God in the midst of a

society which didn't. A godly society would certainly encourage godliness among its people. But the reality is, godly societies are hard to find, anywhere throughout all of history. Those who find grace in the eyes of the Lord are those who walk with God, blameless in their own time (6:8-11). Except for the nation of Israel (from 1500 B.C. to the cross), God never called on people to change their society. He looked for those who were righteous in the midst of that society. The American church today is full of sermons, tapes, and books condemning individualism as an influence from the world. Actually, the world's societies promote community as much as they do individualism.

17. Our primary community is our family (Genesis 6:18).

Noah's walk with God did not come from the influence of his society, but it did influence his family. Not only did his wife and sons get on the ark but his daughters-in-law left their parents behind to get on. Leadership in the church is to come from those who manage their own households well (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1), not those who succeeded in business, politics, or those who were socially prominent. The church is an extended family, not an extension of the society. It's a network of families who create a community throughout a city not a bunch of separate competitive organizations dividing up the community of believers within that city.

17. The will of God is known from, and only from, obeying the Word of God (Genesis 6:9, 22; 7:1, 5).

Noah determined the will of God by looking at only one thing—the Word of God. He did not look to circumstances, the advice of other people, or coincidental happenings in this life. No community, congregation, board, or accountability group decided that Noah should build an ark. To look at anything but the Word of God amounts to determining the will of God by our own or someone else's imagination. And we can imagine conflicting, confusing, contradictory things. I could pray to my coffee cup and find answers to my prayers in the circumstances of my day. That's how the mysticism of all religions function. But God is to be understood through His revealed Word—which for us is the Bible. Plus nothing! Believe in God and His Word. Not religion.

18. Understand God's promises and keep God's commandments (Genesis 6:18; 9:1-17).

The Noahic covenant included:

Three Promises:

- The animals will fear you (9:2)
- There will be no penalty for eating animals (9:3)
- There will never again be a universal flood (9:11-17)

Three Commandments:

- Fill the earth (9:1, 7)
- Don't eat blood (9:3)
- Don't kill people (9:5-6)

Each age has different commandments. We need to learn the promises and keep the commandments for our age.

19. Our sin has far reaching consequences (Genesis 9:20-25).

Noah's drunkenness resulted in sin for his son and a curse on one of his grandchildren. The consequences of sin are rarely restricted to the sinner.

Abraham

20. A relationship with God is initiated by God (Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1; 17:1f; 18:1f) (see also John 6:44).

The first thing we learn about Abraham's relationship with God is that it was initiated by God. Now the Lord said to Abram (12:1). We are, of course, to seek God (Matthew 7:7-8). And we can know from nature that there is a God to seek (Romans 1). But the reality is, we could find God unless He reveals Himself (Jeremiah 29:11-13). As they say in East Tennessee, "You can't get there from here." Religion, all the world's religions, are a way to get to God. They give you a way to use your own sincerity, worship, sacrifice, or works to get to God. They are paths up the mountain. But God is not on the mountain. He is beyond the clouds, above the mountain, and you can't get there no matter what path you take. God has to come to you.

21. God asks men to leave home (Genesis 12:1-50).

In general, it seems that God asks men to leave something behind (home, possessions, relationships). Biblical examples include Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul

(see Hebrews 11:15-16). Boys should remain in submission to their father until they decide to leave. (Isaac was about 40 years old when Abraham chose his wife for him). But when you become a man—leave.

22. Worship is initially personal and private (Genesis 12:6-8; 13:3, 18).

There is no example of Abraham worshipping corporately. Worship was a private thing for Seth (5:26), Noah (8:20), Abraham (Genesis 12:6-8; 13:3, 18), Isaac (24:63), Jacob (28:16-19), and also for Job (Job 1:5), and Gideon (Judges 6:24; 7:15). This personal private worship later flowed together in corporate worship for Jacob (Genesis 31:54). In the Bible, corporate worship generally included fellowship around a shared meal (Genesis 14:18; 31:54). That pattern continued through the law and the church age (Acts 2:42).

23. Wealth provided by God is not contrary to the will of God—luxurious living is (Genesis 13:2, 6).

Abraham may have been the wealthiest man in Canaan, but he lived in a tent. Job was the wealthiest man in the East (Job 1:1-3), but he was known for his generosity, not for living in luxury (Job 29:15-16). The rich man of Luke 16 was not criticized for having wealth (Luke 16:19-31). The one criticizing him (Abraham) was wealthier than he was. He was condemned for living in luxury (James 5:5).

24. A promise of God reveals God's character and lets us in on God's plan, but we don't have to claim it, work for it, or help God bring it about (Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1).

If Abraham would have said, "I'm going to Egypt and stay there," we can assume God would have brought his descendants back to Canaan anyway (12:1-3; 13:14-17; see Acts 9:15). A promise is where God informs us of a piece of His plans. For example, when Jesus said, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18), He was informing the apostles of His plan, not soliciting their help. Faith has to do with the approval of God not bringing about the promises of God (Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:2) Faith is required for God to be pleased with us (Hebrews 11:6) but not for God to fulfill His promises to us. The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional promise. A covenant can be one of two types. It can be an "agreement between two or more parties." We call that a conditional covenant (for example, the Mosaic Covenant). Or a covenant can be a "promise" which is "a pledge" (Webster's Ninth New College Dictionary, p. 300). We call that an unconditional covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was a promise or pledge (Galatians 3:15-19) not an agreement. So, too, were the Rainbow Covenant (Genesis 9) and the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7). In our age, an example of an unconditional covenant would be Christ's promise to build His church (Matthew 16:18). But salvation is a conditional covenant because it has to be received by faith (John 1:12). So is the spiritual life because it has to be lived by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

26. Separation between people who should be united must be done only for the sake of preserving that union (Genesis 13:7-9).

The strife between the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham caused Abraham to recommend a separation to end the strife.

The more significant the union, the more reluctant we should be to suggest a separation. Separation is an indication of failure to resolve personal conflict. There is a wall between two people which cannot be dissolved. Ultimately, all personal conflict is vertical not horizontal. In other words, if you have a conflict with someone, you have a conflict with God. You are saying that you disagree with God about the cross He has given you to take up. This cross may be some particular person He has sovereignly placed in your life for His own reasons. The heroes of the Bible, take, for example, Joseph (Genesis 50:20), Daniel (Daniel 6:22), and Jesus (Luke 23:34), never mentioned other people as having anything to do with determining their life situation.

I'm defining personal conflict as that which is or leads to hatred. So conflict with another person is itself a failure. That failure should be resolved by me changing myself so that I focus on a vertical perspective. Each one in the conflict must focus on their own relationship with God. When that does not happen, separation may be necessary. When it is, it must be done with the following attitudes: (1) peace is better than strife, (2) personal loss is better than compromising biblical standards, (3) to be wronged is better than to do wrong, and (4) to give the other person the first choice is better than to have first choice. These seem to be Abraham's priorities in Genesis 13. Immaturity—say, in children or childish believers—will not tend to have these attitudes. For example, if a 5 and 7 year old are fighting, they are not likely to believe peace is better than strife, etc. What does that tell us about adults who don't have these four attitudes?

27. There is a time to go to war (Genesis 14:13-16).

When Abraham heard that Lot had been taken captive by the kings of Mesopotamia, he took 318 of his own men plus some friends and went to war with those kings. He surrounded them, defeated them, and brought back Lot, the possessions, and the women.

Someone who is always at war is a warmonger. Someone who never goes to war is compromising with sin. There are two areas where we need to go to war: (1) internally against our own sin nature and (2) externally against the influence of sin of others.

Here are some rules for war. (1) Before you can go to war, you must have moral/theological boundaries. You must know where you will draw the line. You can't go to war against everything. God's rules are not negotiable, but maybe some of yours should be. I suggest about 10 or 12 of your own moral issues are all you can reasonably defend. For example, what should you do with earrings, movies, music, alcohol, curfews, etc.? Choose carefully. (2) Don't fight battles you can't win. For example, you'll never wipe out alcoholism or divorce, but you might do so in the life of some particular person. Abraham was prepared to win before he went into battle (Genesis 14:13-14). (3) Have an effective strategy. Don't just pray about it and plow ahead thoughtlessly. Abraham had a strategy (Genesis 14:15). (4) Fight to a complete victory. Don't stop with winning a small battle. Abraham "brought back all the goods. ... Lot with his possessions and also the women and the people" (Genesis 14:16). So, for example, you should go to war with that sin in your life to totally wipe it out. (5) Use all the help you can get from others. Abraham used his allies and 318 men born into his own household (Genesis 14:13, 24).

28. Giving should be seen as an act of submission to God which results in my having less wealth on this earth than before (Genesis 14:17-20).

When Abraham returned from defeating the kings who had kidnapped Lot, he gave Melchizedek, the priest of God, 10%, and he would not take any re-embursement from the King of Sodom.

Surely God will give me more than I have given Him (Malachi 2:1; Luke 6:38). That may or may not include wealth on this planet. Nonetheless, giving, at the time it is done, diminishes our present net worth. Notice: (1) giving is primarily done as an act of submission and obedience to God for the purpose of being rewarded by God. (2) Giving is not collective spending. For example, contributing to a local church or parachurch group for the purpose of building a structure or hiring leaders which we all benefit from is collective spending not giving. Besides, there is no example, or command given to any New Testament church, for a church to give money to itself. (3) 10% "tithing" was both an example and a command before the church age, but it was neither an example nor a command for the church age. "Tithing" 10% only had to do with Abraham and his descendants, the Jewish nation. Ryrie tells us, "Giving a tenth, or tithe, was common among Semitic people and was an act that acknowledged the superiority of the one to whom it was paid" (Ryrie Study Bible, p. 49).

29. A man should not have more than one woman (Genesis 16:1-9).

Abraham took Hagar as a wife. So he had two wives at the same time. That's what we call polygamy. Nowhere does the Bible prohibit polygamy. But it's also true that the Bible nowhere pictures polygamy in a favorable or ideal sense. So it may not be sinful, but it sure is unwise. Abraham and Jacob had more than one wife at the same time. In both cases, it caused numerable problems. Adam was given just one wife. Better to stick with that!

What is socially, culturally and legally acceptable is not necessarily right. The polygamy of Abraham and Jacob was clearly a common socially, culturally, and legally accepted practice. Laban as much as says so (Genesis 29:26-27). That was also apparently true of Hagar being given as sort of a surrogate mother for Sarah. But in both cases, it resulted in agony for all parties. And it was not because God punished them but because of the nature of the acts themselves.

30. A marriage, where either spouse has to deal with children from a different marriage, will inevitably be filled with problems which cannot be solved (Genesis 16:4-6; 21:8-11; 37:3-4).

In Abraham's case, Sarah had to deal with a child of a different wife. But the same is true when you marry someone who brings children into a marriage. The person you marry will almost always put those children before you in the long run. And that destroys the very basis of marriage—putting spouse before everyone but God. In most cases, the other parent of the children will also have to be dealt with.

31. We can expect the Judge of all the earth to deal justly (Genesis 18:25).

Before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded with Him not to destroy the righteous people with the wicked people. Abraham asked God to act consistently with His character. Good prayer! God agreed. He even said He would spare the whole city if ten righteous could be found. The angels only found four, Lot and his family. Then God removed the four righteous people before destroying the city. We might call it the “rapture” principle. God removed Noah before the flood, Lot before the destruction of Sodom, the good people before Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem, and He will remove the church before the wrath of the Tribulation.

There are three things we should understand about the justice of God:

(1) God does not punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty. So if anyone you know is righteous and suffering (like Job), it is not because of the judgment of God. It may be the discipline of God or a test from God, or the effects of the sins of others, or the fact is that we live in a cursed world, or many other things, including a spiritual battle between God and Satan (as with Job). But it is not the judgment of God. We should never try to figure out why we are suffering.

(2) God’s justice in our age is carried out at the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15) and at the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers (2 Corinthians 5:10). God may judge the church during this age (1 Corinthians 11:29-32; Revelation 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:16) in certain places and in specific ways. But not necessarily. What He will necessarily do is bring every act into judgment (Romans 14:10-12). As believers, our sins are paid by the judgment of Christ on the cross. But our works are still judged to determine our rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

(3) God is just, not fair. The justice of God is God acting consistent with His own character toward everyone. Fairness is treating everyone the same. God promised to be just, not fair. The Bible is full of instances where God is not fair. Actually, the whole selective process of choosing Abraham, then Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over his brothers, was not fair. Neither is His choice of the Israelites over the Canaanites or His choice of you and I over those who don’t receive Christ. None of that is fair, but all of it is just—God dealing consistently from Himself as a standard. We should do the same. Don’t try to be fair with people—like, for example, treating your children or employees all the same. But be sure you are just with people—treating them from your own (hopefully biblical) standards.

32. Everything contrary to the character of God is sin, whether it’s an action or an intention, whether it’s known or unknown (Genesis 20:1-18).

When Abraham went to Gerar, he told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. So Abimelech took her and put her in his harem. Then God told Abimelech, You are a dead man. Abimelech claimed innocence, but God said he had to correct the potentially sinful situation. So sin was sin, even if Abimelech didn’t know he was committing it.

We saw this with Cain and Abel, but with Abraham and Abimelech, we see this more fully. God is good by definition. Good is not a standard God keeps. It’s who God is. If you don’t like it, change your mind—that’s called repentance. Anything contrary to the moral character of God is sin. It doesn’t matter if you know about it or not. It doesn’t matter if God has expressed it to us in a commandment or if it’s just part of His expectations for His creatures. It doesn’t matter if it’s an intention or an action. If it’s contrary to God’s character, it’s sin.

Abimelech “took Sarah” (apparently to be one of his wives) because Abraham told him she was his sister. I would think that the burden of the sin lay with Abraham. Abimelech acted in the integrity of his heart. Both God and Abimelech agreed about that. God also said, I also kept you from sinning against Me, therefore I did not let you touch her. Now, therefore, restore the man’s wife... (Genesis 20:6-7). Had God not revealed Himself to Abimelech, he would have died from the judgment of God (verses 3, 7). As it was, God kept his other wives from conceiving and may have given Abimelech some genital related disease. So he had already sinned and would have sinned more—enough to be killed by God’s judgment, and he had no idea what he had done. Abimelech had not intentionally violated any commandment. God had not given him any commandment. Abimelech was pretty much clueless about God. He was judged not because of what he knew or intended but because he violated the character of God.

33. Decision making must come from the Word of God, not just our love for people (Genesis 21:9-13).

Sarah finally had a child. But when Hagar and her child became a problem, she wanted Abraham to send them away. I would have said that’s the wrong thing to do because it’s uncompassionate.

Humanitarian compassion is a good basis for making moral decisions if, and only if, it is not in conflict with the plan of God. The plan of God is only revealed to us in the written Word of God. If I had not read Genesis 21, I would have said Abraham should not have listened to Sarah's demand to drive out this maid and her son, based on humanitarian reasons (verse 10). I would have thought Hagar and Ishmael should stay because: (1) Abraham apparently loved his son Ishmael (verse 11), (2) Sarah's motive seems to be a selfish desire to preserve the inheritance only for her son (verse 10), (3) this was dangerous, if not deadly, for Hagar and Ishmael (verse 16), and (4) Abraham had a responsibility for them.

However, as He always does, God did not take sides, He took over. He took care of both women and their sons. But His plan called for them to be separated. God would reveal Himself to the world only through the descendants of Sarah's son Isaac until that seed provided mankind with a Messiah (see John 4:21-24). But Abraham didn't know all that. He only knew that his feelings, his compassion, and his responsibilities all had to be set aside if they did not conform to the Word of God.

Today, we know a lot more about the plan of God for the world and for believers. But we do not know what God is doing in our lives apart from what is written in His Word (Ecclesiastes 3:11; John 3:8). What we can do is what Abraham did. We can obey God's Word—say, in areas of marriage, divorce, submission, headship, gossip, revenge, etc.

34. God tests His own people (Genesis 22:1-12).

Abraham is given one of the greatest tests in all the Bible when he is asked to sacrifice his son Isaac.

There is something you should know about God. He tests people. He tests His own people. He tests the faithful, the saints, those who are following Him closely, those who are in the center of His will.

Why does He test His own faithful people? James says it's to demonstrate and develop their faith (James 1:2-4; 2:21-24). Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32).

How does God test people? By bringing them to the edge, then seemingly over the edge, where there is no return, no rescue, no reasonable hope, seemingly no hope at all. Then in the midst of what would appear to be a situation of despair, at the last minute, God delivers.

Matthew 1 tells us this about the birth of Jesus. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:18-20). Now if I were Joseph, I would have said to the angel, "Where were you nine months ago? Why didn't you tell me this back then before I went through all this agony which resulted in a decision to break our betrothal and get a quiet divorce?" But God, it seems, brought Joseph almost over the edge before he delivered him.

Noah worked on the ark for 100 years, probably under the criticism of everybody. Then finally Noah is told to get his family on the ark. His wife and sons are taken from their friends. His daughters-in law are taken from their families. Then they just sit there (on the ark with all the animals) and nothing happens for seven days. If I were Noah, my faith in God's Word would be brought right to the edge of its limits. Then it began to rain!

In the chapter before Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac, we see Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness of Beer-sheba about to die of thirst. Hagar had completely given up on any rescue from God. Her faith was over the edge. Her only prayer was, Do not let me see the boy die. She walked away from his lifeless body and sat down where she could not see him (Genesis 21:14-16). Then the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven ...!

Abraham took Isaac up to Mt. Moriah, where Solomon later built the Temple in Jerusalem. We read, And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son (Genesis 22:10). My faith would have been over the edge. Then the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven ...! (verse 11).

God tests faithful people.

35. True worship is totally dependent on God providing the sacrifice (Genesis 22:8).

When Abraham was taking Isaac up Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him, Isaac observes, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? (22:7). We should ask the same question today. Here is our religion. Here is our church. Here is our confession, our creed, our liturgy, our prayers, even our sincerity. But where is the sacrifice sufficient to pay for our sins and bring us into the presence of a just God? The answer is, the basis of our salvation and the essence of our hope. It's the answer Abraham gave Isaac, and it reveals the sufficiency of his faith. He said, God will provide for Himself the lamb ... (22:8). Whatever sacrifice we give, whatever liturgy we recite, whatever sincere activities we perform, it's all useless unless it's dependent on God providing for Himself the Lamb for the sacrifice.

36. In our personal business and financial dealings, we should generally be respected by the non-Christian community (Genesis 23:6-18).

When Sarah died, Abraham bought a piece of land in Hebron which contained a cave where he buried her. The sons of Heth, who owned the land, had so much respect for Abraham, they said, Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead (Genesis 23:6).

But Abraham wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah for the full price. The whole transaction was public—before a live audience. No one could deny the legitimacy or fairness of the deal. Also, Abraham didn't say, "Hey, God gave me this land, so it's mine and I'll take whatever cave I want to bury my wife." Instead, he negotiated a respectful deal filled with generosity and mutual respect, which could not be denied for years to come. Actually, the place is still there today. Our personal and business deals should be the same. They should be open to public scrutiny, fair, and generous, not stingy or selfish—trying to gauge the last cent out of every deal.

37. Marriage should be consistent with the parameters of the will of God given by the Word of God (Genesis 24:4-8).

With the death of Sarah, Abraham had one major task left in his life—to find the right bride for Isaac. So he sent his servant (probably Eliezer of Damascus—Genesis 15:2) to get a wife for Isaac from his relatives. He told his servant, But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there (Genesis 24:8).

So it seems Abraham had two priorities. Priority #1: No matter what—and the implication seems to be even if Abraham died before all this got done—Isaac was under no circumstances to be taken out of the land. Priority #2: Isaac's bride must be a Semitic Mesopotamian, not a Canaanite.

By way of application, we cannot do as Abraham did and let race and geographic origin determine the qualifications for marriage. The church, unlike Israel, is of every race all over the world. For the church, there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek (Romans 10:12). But that does not mean any matchup is okay. We should not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We must not marry homosexuals (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). We must not marry a divorced person whose former spouse is still living (Romans 7:2-3). Our separation from the world should be spiritual and moral not racial or geographical. There are also matters of wisdom and unity in the body that must be considered. Marriage involves families, not just two people romantically in love. Backgrounds, habits, customs, cultures, and life-style preferences must all be taken into consideration (see Ruth 3:10-13).

38. There is nothing wrong with remarrying another believer after one's spouse dies, but care must be taken to protect the original family (Genesis 25:1, 5, and 6).

After Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah. She was undoubtedly only a fraction of his age, since she bore him at least six children without any miraculous intervention from God. Abraham may have had other wives, too, since "concubines" is plural in verse 6. A concubine is a wife without rights of inheritance, so it appears Keturah also fell into that category. Her children were treated well but not equal to Isaac. Abraham gave them gifts—probably starter herds—and sent them away from his son Isaac (v. 6).

Our society looks down on an old man who marries a young wife half or a third his age. Biblically, however, there is nothing wrong with that (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Actually, it appears to have been common. The problem comes when the new second marriage produces children. We need to be careful not to destroy the social community of the original family, and the reality is, that may be very difficult in the modern world if you enter into a second marriage (1 Corinthians 7:40).

39. Godly people die, but they do not cease to serve the same God they served while alive on earth (Genesis 25:8; Luke 16:19-31).

Abraham died, and his body was buried in the same cave he bought when Sarah died. The author tells us he was gathered to his people (verse 8). So somehow he was not in the cave but with “his people.” What people? Well, it wasn’t the Jewish people. He was the first one of those. So it must have been people like Adam, Seth, and Noah—other people who believe in God.

But Genesis 25 is not the last we hear of Abraham in the Bible. Two thousand years later, Jesus gives a glimpse of what he was doing at the time of Christ. Luke records Christ’s account of the death of a luxuriously rich unbeliever and a poor believing beggar named Lazarus. Both immediately reach the afterlife, and there is Abraham, involved in explaining why each of them are where they are.

When a patriarch dies, an era is over on earth. Families and ministries must readjust. New leadership must emerge from those who are the givers. When the saints die, they are gone. They do not live here on earth anymore. They may be remembered, and their memory will be impacting for awhile. But soon they are forgotten and life goes on without them. The saints themselves, however, have only changed their location and their assignments. Their service for God continues on just as vigorously as before.

Lot

40. The generally righteous person who does not impact his household or community probably fears the world more than God (Genesis 19:1-22).

Abraham was a bedouin sheep herder living in a tent. But when Lot separated from him, Lot settled in the cities (13:12). By the time the angels came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot is living in a house instead of a tent (19:2-3). When the angels pulled he and his wife and two daughters out of the city, he wanted to live in another city, the small town of Zoar (19:18-20). Abraham became a strong influential part of his community. He was respected and honored and even voluntarily served by his neighbors (Genesis 14:13, 24; 21:22-23; 23:4-6). But Lot was at odds with his neighbors (19:9).

It’s not just that Lot became like those he lived with. Quite the contrary. Peter tells us Lot was ... oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men and while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds (2 Peter 2:7-8). But neither was Lot able to influence those he lived with. Even his own son-in-laws did not listen to him (Genesis 19:14).

What’s the difference between a righteous man like Noah, Abraham, and Joseph, who made an impact and those like Lot who didn’t? One answer seems to be Lot’s fear of the things of this world. He seems to be afraid to live on his own, outside the cities, so he settles in a city even though it’s wicked and its wickedness bothers him. He seems afraid of the homosexuals of the city, so he offers them his virgin daughters. He is afraid of living in the mountains after leaving Sodom (19:18-19).

Possibly you know people like Lot. Good people generally. Those who hate evil and love good. But they are wussies. They are too afraid to take a stand if it means trusting God and taking on the world. They will talk against the bad guy but not stand up to them. They seem to be afraid, but it’s not a fear of God.

41. Righteousness will include a stand against sexual perversion, especially homosexuality (Genesis 19:4-7).

Lot lacked courage in several areas and lived in fear of his wicked neighbors. But at least he labeled them as wicked and judged their homosexual actions as such (19:9). Righteousness, goodness, godliness, however you want to say it, is characterized many ways in Scripture, but the list will almost always include a condemnation of sexual perversion. And one of, if not the greatest, sexual perversions described in the Bible is homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22, 29; 20:13; Romans 1:26; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10). It’s one thing to be a repentant recovering homosexual. That we should always forgive. It’s another thing to say (as some have said), “We’re here. We’re queer. Get used to it.”

Lot’s Wife

42. Obedience to God cannot be restricted to conscience (Genesis 19:17 and 26).

All we know about Lot's wife is that she looked back and became a pillar of salt (19:26). Generally speaking, we should always follow our conscience. But obedience to God cannot be restricted to our conscience. God may tell us to do things which don't seem important to our moral structure. We know nothing of Lot's wife's reasons or motives, but certainly there is nothing wrong with watching a city burn—unless God says there is. Our moral convictions, even as believers, are tied to this world. They may be liberal or conservative. They might favor people over God or things over people. Anyway, conscience is valuable but flawed. Follow it when in doubt about what to do. But keep checking it with the Word of God because God's Word is our guide, not what seems okay or not okay.

Isaac

43. Be faithful to your calling, and your calling is determined by: (1) your gifts, (2) your desires, and (3) your life situation (Genesis 22—28:various passages).

Isaac didn't really do very much. But then one could argue he wasn't asked to do very much. His main function was to be the link between Abraham and Jacob. And we have to recognize he was that, not just genealogically but also spiritually.

On the positive side:

- (1) He trusted his godly father Abraham (22:7-9; 24:66-67).
- (2) He left home, became a man, and established his own household (24:62).
- (3) He was a man of meditation (24:63).
- (4) He was faithful to his wife—he was not an adulterer.
- (5) He was faithful to God—he was not an idolator.
- (6) He believed in the sovereignty of God (28:3 "El Shaddai").
- (7) He believed in the power of prayer (25:21, he prayed for his wife, the only Genesis patriarch recorded doing that).
- (8) He responded to the wisdom of his wife (27:46—28:5).
- (9) He was not lazy about work (26: 12-14).
- (10) He was a man of peace (26:16-22).
- (11) He was a man of worship (26:25).
- (12) He believed the Word of God (26:2, 6, 24-25).

On the other hand:

- (1) He tended to put his own interest over God's in that he loved the son God hated (25:28; 27:8-10; Malachi 2:1-3).
- (2) He followed his father's sins and weaknesses in lying about his wife (26:1-11).
- (3) He was insensitive to the details of the Word of God (compare 25:23 with 27:4).
- (4) He did not disciple his sons very well or very much (see 28:8-9).

The point is, be faithful to God, using well the position God has given you in life. Utilize your gifts, talents, abilities, desires, and your place in society—your family roles, job, race, nationality, etc., for the glory of God in your own age (see Genesis 6:9 and Acts 13:36).

Esau

44. Never sacrifice future rewards for short-term desires (Genesis 25:29-34).

The end of Genesis 25 reveals the desires of Jacob and Esau. Esau loved hunting and being outdoors. Jacob wanted the family inheritance. One day when he came in from hunting, Esau traded his birthright for some stew Jacob was cooking. Esau made the three typical mistakes of the foolish and immature:

- (1) He gave up the future for the present.
- (2) He focused on serving his appetites rather than controlling them.
- (3) He concentrated on what he was doing instead of what God was doing.

The most significant difference between Jacob and Esau is that Jacob wanted what God wanted—his descendants to inherit the land (see Hebrews 12:16).

Jacob

45. Never think that just because God uses you, He approves of you (Genesis 27:1-40, especially verses 19-24).

God used Jacob to carry out His covenant with Abraham and to fulfill His promise to Rebekah in 25:23, Two nations are in your womb ... the older shall serve the younger. But that did not mean God approved of Jacob's deceptions. Jacob lied to his father Isaac three times in order to get the birthright. Possibly Isaac did not know about the prediction of 25:23. If not, Rebekah should have told him. If he had refused to give Jacob the birthright, we can assume God would have fulfilled 25:23 some other way. So the lies were uncalled for.

For reasons all His own, God determined Jacob to be the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob was used by God but not necessarily approved by God. Never get the idea that just because God has used you in some situation, or all your life for that matter, that He approves of you. God used evil people, Satan, and demons, and evil spirits to bring about His plan (Judges 9:23; 1 Samuel 16:14; Isaiah 19:2, 14; 2 Corinthians 12:7). God's approval comes from your conformity to His character, not His uses of your actions.

46. Maturity begins when we change from obtaining our well-being, through our own interests, to obtaining our well-being through the interests of God (Genesis 28:10-22).

The two most significant events in Jacob's life were his two theophanies (appearances of God). That's understandable. I'm sure that would be true for any of us. For Jacob, one was at Luz, which he renamed Bethel (the house of God) on his way to Haran. The other was on his way back, at the Jabbok River. He called that place Peniel (the face of God). The significance of both events was that they gave Jacob the Word of God. The ladder dream at Bethel woke Jacob up to the presence of God in his life. He said, Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it (verse 16). Then Jacob pours some oil on a stone, as sort of a marker, I guess. He calls it a "pillar" (verse 22). Then he made a vow which is a kind of deal with God. If God keeps him safe on his journey, then the Lord will be my God (verse 21).

It seems to me Jacob's commitment to God was still pretty weak. God made a promise to him, and he made a deal with God in the form of a conditional vow. Jesus said to not make vows at all (Matthew 5:33-37). Apparently, it's because we can't control the future well enough to guarantee we'll keep them.

But even if Jacob's faith is not the greatest at this point, we have to say this for him—he left Bethel a changed man. (1) His short-term goal of escaping Esau got stretched to a long-term goal of participating in the Abrahamic Covenant. (2) He saw the pursuit of his well-being via the interests of God, not just getting his way by his own scheming. I think we cross over into the pursuit of maturity when we make that change in our thinking. Maturity is not giving up on pursuing what's in our own best interests but pursuing our best interests through the interests of God instead of independent from God.

47. Romantic love is a legitimate factor for initiating marriage (Genesis 29:11, 17, 18, 20, and 30).

Jacob fell head-over-heels in love with Rachel. Probably it was love at first sight. She was beautiful of form, face, and eye. She dominated the rest of his life. He was willing to work 14 years in all to get her. He continued to prioritize her even when she was barren. He favored her children when she finally conceived. Even after she died having her second child, Jacob favored her children (Joseph and Benjamin) over all his other children until the day of his death. And he never married anyone else to replace her when she died. In the end, it's Rachel's son Joseph who is the most godly character in the book of Genesis.

The Song of Solomon teaches us about the legitimacy of romance as a motive for getting married. C. S. Lewis put it well when he said that romance blinds us to the realities of marriage. Romance is not the only consideration, and it's a wild card that does not confine itself to marriage. It also causes unwanted affairs, unwanted pregnancies, unwanted children, and unwanted sexual diseases. It destroys marriage and families. It leaves spouses and children alone and embittered. It may be the most destructive force known to man. But it does have a legitimate function—to get us married. It probably peaks right before marriage (as in the Song of Solomon), and it must be traded in on real love after marriage—giving instead of getting. Nonetheless, it has a legitimate role. With all its dangers, romantic love is a valid basis for initiating marriage.

48. Husbands love your wives. God does not like to see a wife unloved (Genesis 29:31).

With Laban, Jacob met his match in the deception department. Laban promised Jacob Rachel, gave him Leah, and

Jacob consummated a marriage he didn't ask for. I'm sure it's dark in those tents, and the girls were apparently about the same size, but I suspect he was also drunk (Genesis 29:22, 23). So he ended up married to both of Laban's daughters. But that didn't affect the fact that the only one he loved romantically was Rachel. Then God stepped into the situation. We read, Now the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren (Genesis 29:31).

God said nothing against Jacob's romantic love for Rachel except that it left Leah unloved. But true love (hesed/agape) is defined by a giving which is not reciprocated. You can't give it back. For God so loved the world that He gave (John 3:16). Not only that, but He gave His only begotten Son. How could we possibly reciprocate that kind of love? Even if Jacob had romantic love for Rachel, he could have given attention to Leah. Giving love does not expect a return.

When we focus on getting (as romantic love does), we will tend to ignore whoever we are not going to get something from. In giving love, the focus is on the giving itself and on God, whom it pleases. It hopes for a reward from God, not the person loved. So even if marriage is started because of romantic-getting love, it can only continue to be what a marriage should be if it's based in real giving love.

49. God's plan for the circumstance of our lives can only be determined in hindsight (Genesis 29—32:various passages).

Jacob could have never have guessed when he left Canaan that God planned for him to be gone for 20 years and return with two wives, 2 concubines, and 11 children. He probably felt he understood God's will for his life when he met Rachel and planned to work 7 years to get her as a wife. She was perfect. Her looks, race, family, everything. His mission and God's promise at Bethel seemed to be complete.

But why did God give him Leah? Why did he have to work 14 years to get Rachel? Why did God make it so hard to leave Laban? If I were him, when I saw Rachel I'd probably think, "I can see God's will in my present circumstances." Then possibly acquiring greater maturity, I'd have to say, "It looks like God's will is at odds with my present circumstances" (Genesis 30:25—31:7).

If we try to determine what God is doing in our lives by our present circumstances, when those circumstances are not stated in the Scripture, we will have no way to distinguish between a work of God, a work of Satan, or wishful thinking. The will of God is determined exclusively by the character of God revealed in the Word of God. Looking back into our past, we can determine the circumstances God has ordained for us. But even then we cannot determine if they were His preferences unless they are stated in the written Word of God.

At the end of Jacob's 20 years in Paddan-aram, his circumstances did favor his leaving. But we still only know this is the will of God from the Word of God (Genesis 31:3, 13).

50. Thank God, not your methods, for your effectiveness (Genesis 30:37-43).

Jacob made a deal with Laban that he would take with him only the speckled and spotted animals. So Laban, true to form, separated the off-color animals so as to reduce the chances of Jacob getting a large herd (30:1-36). Then Jacob used a kooky idea (which was apparently an old myth) that what is physically seen during conception shows up on the child. This was, of course, a false theory. The reality is, God caused the results in spite of Jacob's phony idea and stupid methods. Jacob also practiced selective breeding, using this weird idea. But he also acknowledged that it was God Who produced more speckled sheep (31:9). Actually, he told his wives that it was God Who caused the off-colored males to mate.

All through history, people have functioned effectively with fake ideas. Ships sailed based on the flat-earth theory in the Middle Ages. Fat red meat was considered good for you in the 1950s. Today drugs are considered to be the answer for behavioral problems. You may think you are successful in business because you use Earl Nightingale's success principles or Steven Covey's win-win system. You may think your church is "successful" because it copies some "successful" mega-church or you reach people for Christ because of the tract you use. But all that is wrong and foolish thinking. What about businesses who use those methods and fail? What about a church which copies a mega-church and stays small? What about people who use that tract and don't reach anybody for Christ? Then, too, there is the possibility that your methods might produce worldly success contrary to the will of God (like Israel making Saul king). The truth is, if you are talking about real lasting values, you are what you are and you have what you have because

God gave it to you—pure and simple. Thank God, not your methods!

51. Fear should turn us to God in prayer (Genesis 32:6-12).

After making a clean break with Laban (finally), Jacob returned to his own land of Canaan. Jacob sacrificed an animal and invited Laban and the in-laws to a meal. Notice again that when private worship overflows into corporate worship, it's usually in the form of a meal—even in the church (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-21; Jude 12).

Now Jacob's concerns change from Laban to Esau. Esau is coming to him with 400 men, and Jacob is afraid (32:6-7). His fear drives him to prayer. Quite often that happens with us, too. And that's okay. True, we should pray without ceasing, but we usually don't. So when fear brings us to our knees before God, that's good.

If we fear God, we don't have to fear anything else. But we do fear other things—the Esaus of our life. When we do, it may reflect a lack of faith, but the remedy is still to humble ourselves before God. Notice Jacob's prayer was one of (1) reminding God of His Word, (2) admitting his own unworthiness, (3) crediting God for all His gifts, and (4) pleading for deliverance. When you are afraid, I'd suggest coming to God the same way.

52. The spiritual life is like a wrestling match between you and God, where you begin by trying to get away from God and end up clinging to God in order to be blessed by God (Genesis 32:22-32).

Now Jacob must face his old problem—Esau. He left Canaan 20 years ago because Esau was trying to kill him. Now he's returning and has to deal with that. As an answer to his prayer, God (that would be God the Son—John 1:18) appears to him in the form of a wrestler. God has revealed Himself in many different ways throughout history—as a man to Abraham, in a burning bush to Moses, as a soldier to Joshua, in a whirlwind to Job, but here He's a wrestler. God's response to Jacob's prayer was to give him an all-night wrestling match. When God did not prevail against Jacob, God asked Jacob to let go. But Jacob refused, asking for a blessing first. The fact that he asked for a blessing and that he named the place Peniel (the face of God) shows that during the night Jacob realized he was wrestling with God, and Jacob refused to let God go without His blessing.

God blessed him when he understood he needed it and hung on until he got it. He finally realized his struggle was not with Esau, it was with God. The deception and clever methods he'd used against Esau and Laban would not help against Esau plus 400 men. But Esau was just the laboratory in which Jacob would come to the maturity of realizing his need for the blessing of God. In Genesis 32, God first picked a fight with Jacob. Then, in the morning, God took the role of someone trying to get away. This forced Jacob to hang on and fight for the blessing of God.

The spiritual life is a wrestling match. On the one hand, we wrestle with our sin (Romans 7:15-25). On the other hand, we also wrestle with God. This second struggle is about God conforming us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) by humbling us into seeking His blessing (James 4:6).

53. Keep yourself and your family separated from unbelievers, even if the unbelievers are good people (Genesis 33:1-17).

When Jacob reconciled with Esau, he introduced him to his large family and talked him into receiving a gift, which helped ensure peace between them. Esau then invited Jacob to accompany his group of 400 back south to Seir. [Seir is the area east of the Gulf of Aqaba, distinguished by the mountain range of that name.] But Jacob begged off, saying they needed to move slowly because of the children and the nursing animals. Esau offered to leave some men with him, presumably for protection, but Jacob politely declined that offer, too.

So what Jacob did was to keep his family and those with them completely separated from Esau and those with him. Esau was no longer a threat. His people seemed nice enough. Nonetheless, Jacob wanted his people to remain separated from the Edomites (the Esau-ites). So did God. This was consistent with God's Word that He would build a nation from Jacob (28:13-15; 35:10-12).

It's good to be good to unbelieving neighbors and relatives. But they are not part of what God is doing today—building His church. We should be available to them evangelistically but not make them part of our network of believer relationships—the church.

54. When you have been wronged or you are in the process of being wronged, resolve the situa-

tion but do not get revenge (Genesis 34:1-31).

Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, went to visit the girls in Shechem, the city next to the land they bought (34:17-18). She lived with her 11 brothers, so she probably wanted to find a girl she could be friends with. Her age is probably quite young—maybe 12 years old. [Take 20 years with Laban, subtract 7 years before his marriage = 13 minus 5 years for 6 brothers to be born to Leah = 8, plus maybe 3 years in Succoth and one for travel = 12 years old. Of course, they may have lived longer in Succoth, but Dinah is called a “young girl” in 34:4.]

When Dinah arrived in the city, Hamor's son Shechem [the city and the young man have the same name—like the name “DeWitt” in Michigan], he raped her. But Shechem was also in love with her, so he asked his father to get her for him as a wife. Meanwhile, they kept her captive in Shechem's house. Jacob and his sons came up with a scheme whereby they convinced the men of Shechem to be circumcised. Then the Israelite boys killed all the men of Shechem and looted the city.

Jacob objected to their extreme measures. It was right to do something to get Dinah back. Even justice may have been a correct motive. It wouldn't be for us as individuals in the church age because we aren't the government (compare Genesis 9:6 with Romans 13:1-3). But these cities and beduion tribes were, in a sense, their own government. Revenge, however, was not a correct motive for them. The situation had to be rectified, but revenge only stimulates more problems. Try to solve problems, but don't seek revenge.

55. “Shepherd the flock among you” (Genesis 35:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Jacob is one of the few men we read about who started spiritually weak and got better with age. There are some like Joseph and Daniel, who started well and are steady as a rock their whole lives. Many start well and finish poorly, like Saul and Solomon. There are only a few, like Jacob, who start poorly and end well. Jacob went from a deceptive liar to a man of God to a patriarch who obeyed God and led his family in purity and worship. He ended his life with a godly sense of justice and righteousness (Genesis 49).

When God told Jacob to arise and go up to Bethel and live there and make an altar to God ... (35:1), Jacob obeyed. But he also told his household to get rid of any signs of idolatry and to purify themselves. The self-purification meant wearing different clothes and taking off the rings which were in their ears (35:2-4). The rings and the household idols were probably expensive (probably gold), but Jacob didn't sell them or melt them down, he just buried them and left them behind. Then he led his family in worship. God affirmed his actions by appearing to him again and confirming the Abrahamic Covenant with him (35:9-15).

Learn from the mistakes, the sins, the foolishness of your youth. Conform yourself to the Word of God and become a man. Then as your flock ages and increases, shepherd them in the direction of purity.

56. Tell it like it is—morality matters (Genesis 49:1-27).

When Jacob was about to die, he pronounced blessings, or more accurately, predictions, upon his 12 sons. In each case, he dealt with them accurately and without nice-ing it over. You might think at the time of his death he would want to be remembered fondly, so he would just overlook the boys' past sins and destructive tendencies. But Jacob tells it like it is—or was—and uses that as a basis for his prayers and predictions for his sons. For example, there is his limited blessing on Reuben for his adultery with Bilhah (35:22). There is also his scattering prediction for Simeon and Levi because of their anger and vengeful wrath, killing the men and animals of Shechem (34:25). And by contrast, there is his blessing on Joseph, for his resiliency under attack and fruitfulness while suffering.

Of course, we can't make the predictions Jacob did. But we can call it like it is. We must talk with our children and grandchildren and our extended family and friends about the way things actually are. Don't sugarcoat sin or tolerate godless actions. On the other hand, don't overlook the righteous acts of godly people. Give both as living examples to your children. Don't gossip, just state the obvious actions everybody knows about in their true biblical light. Morality matters, and “the flock among you” should be reminded of that.

Joseph

57. Teens, and adults, for that matter, should have more regard for the truth than for their social status with peers (Genesis 37:2).

In Genesis 37, the author begins the last major part of the book—the life of Joseph. This section opens with Joseph at the age of 17, pasturing the flock with his brothers. Then we read that he brought back a bad report about them to

their father. Many people say Joseph was immature and insensitive to the trouble he was bringing upon himself. But all we know is, Joseph told the truth. He had more regard for the truth than he did for his social status with his brothers. We should, of course, not try to look for things which cause trouble or gossip about people. But whenever called upon, we should tell the truth, even if it affects our social well-being.

58. We should have more regard for making known the Word of God than for our social status (Genesis 37:3-11).

While he was still 17, Joseph received revelations from God in the form of two dreams. One had to do with his brothers' stalks of grain bowing down to his, and the other was about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him. His brothers were furious about it. His father first rebuked him but then decided to just keep it in mind. Some say Joseph was being proud or boastful. But I see none of that here. Joseph was born in a favorable position—we'd say "with a silver spoon in his mouth." His father favored him. He was intelligent, clever, and good looking to boot. So his brothers hated him before he ever had a vision (37:4). When he had the dreams, he simply made them known. Should we not make known the Word of God as we learn it? We know little about Joseph's maturity or motives at this time, so there is no point in guessing. What we do know is he was (1) truthful, (2) honest, (3) obedient to his father (verse 13), and (4) he made known the Word of God, and he did that even when it caused him to be rebuked by his father and hated even more by his brothers. We should not go about preaching to everybody. But there are many significant occasions where we should make known the Word of God to those close to us, even if it affects our social standings with those people.

59. Never blame people for your situation (Genesis 37:12-36).

Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, who, all but Reuben and Judah, apparently planned to kill him instead. Joseph became a slave and was later imprisoned because of his slavery. But he never blamed his brothers. The anguish over his supposed death almost killed their father. Joseph never mentioned that either. Later Joseph says, ... God sent me before you to preserve life ... and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God ... (Genesis 45:5-8). Even when Joseph tried to get himself released from prison because he was kidnapped and had done nothing wrong (40:14-15), he never blamed his brothers.

For that matter, he never blamed Potiphar's wife for lying. Now that must have been interesting later on. When Pharaoh promoted Joseph to #2 man in all of Egypt, he could have easily got revenge against Potiphar's wife (Genesis 41:39-45). But he never mentions her at all. We can expect that due to Potiphar's high position that he and his wife probably attended some—if not many—of the same formal social events as Joseph. She had to be aware that Joseph could have blown the whistle on her and had her thrown into prison at any moment. Yet Joseph said nothing. Can't you just hear her thoughts (when she found out Joseph had been promoted). But Joseph never mentions her at all. Why? Because it was all a work of God. Never blame people for your problems. And, by the way, never give credit to people for your blessings.

60. Be a responsible industrious hard worker in whatever situation God has placed you (Genesis 39:1-6).

It was God Who made Joseph successful. God also made Joseph prosperous, handsome, and favorable in the eyes of his master. But that does not mean Joseph sat around waiting for God to bless him. We read, he became a successful man and that the Lord was with him and caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. God caused the prosperity and Joseph worked hard and smart. That does not mean God helps those who help themselves. Lots of people help themselves while ignoring God. Lots of people are helped by God without doing much. Lots of people work hard and smart and are not helped by God in the sense of physical prosperity. The point we learn from Joseph is that he was industrious, hard working, and responsible because that's the way he was. God then used it to His own end, and blessed Joseph, too.

61. Sin is always fundamentally against God not against people (Genesis 39:9).

When Joseph is propositioned by Potiphar's wife, he explains to her that he cannot be with her because it's a sin against God. It would violate Potiphar's trust in him as well. But the reason that is a problem is because it's a sin against God to violate that trust. To lie with his wife would be against Potiphar, but it was only a sin against God, since God, not Potiphar, made up the rules. Morality measured against people will lead you to a very different standard than morality against God. That's seen clearly in issues like homosexual rights, feminism, divorce, remarriage, and abortion. Without God, all those issues will make sense. They only don't make sense if your standard is justice rather

than fairness, i.e., the character of God rather than humanism. People may sin against you in the sense that you are the target or sufferer of the fallout of their sin. But at a basic root level, all sin is committed only against God (Psalm 51).

62. Sexual adultery is worse than many other sins (Genesis 39:9-10).

One more issue must be observed here. Joseph calls adultery a great sin. He also refused to lie beside Potiphar's wife or even be with her. Being with a woman might not be sin, but it is if there is any possibility you might have sex with her. And that is the case any time a man and woman of anywhere close to the same age are alone together. The only way to avoid the potential problem is to do what Joseph did and avoid the situation—even if it makes the other person angry and hence gets you in trouble.

Idolatry is probably worse than adultery, but adultery is worse than most sins (1 Corinthians 6:18). Anyway, don't fall into the trap of thinking all sins are the same. They're not (John 19:11; Luke 12:47-48; Mark 12:40).

63. The verbally inspired Word of God comes only through His prophets, captured by them in the original words of the Bible (Genesis 40:8).

Five dreams played a significant role in Joseph's life. Two when he was 17 (Genesis 37), two in prison (Genesis 40), and one before Pharaoh (Genesis 41). Dreams were commonly held as prophetic in the ancient world. Both Babylon and Egypt had professional dream interpreters. As in other areas (like animals sacrifices, tithing, and covenants), God used what people were familiar with and changed it to be uniquely from Himself. In the case of dreams, God used them to reveal His Word verbally but only through His own people. The Babylonians and Egyptians always had to guess about dreams and hope they were right, even when they came from the true God of Abraham and Isaac.

Of course, even false prophets are right some of the time. That's why God, through the Mosaic Law, condemned any dream interpretation based on any other gods, even (or especially) if the prophecy came true (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). When God revealed something to a Gentile through a dream, it required a Hebrew to get it beyond the parable stage into real inspired words. According to Jesus, that was simply because God did not grant it to them to know what it meant (Matthew 13:11ff).

So we must understand that it is the only one true God, the God of Israel, the God of the church, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who reveals truth verbally in a message that is word-for-word without error. Anybody might have claimed to have dreams or visions or whatever, but, as Joseph told the cupbearer, interpretations belong to God, and God only reveals them through His own prophets.

Does God give visions and dreams today? Frankly, I doubt it. But even if He does, there is no way to know what it means apart from the inspired Word of God—which is, for us, the Bible. Interpretations belong to God.

So don't tell your kids there is a Santa Claus or an Easter Bunny or a Tooth Fairy or any other mystical hooey. These are not things coming from God. Don't get hooked on the revelations claimed by Mohammed or Mrs. White or Joseph Smith or an apparition of the Virgin Mary. The messages of God come only through the Word of God, delivered by His prophets, and written down without error in the Scriptures of the Bible. When He finished revealing it through the Apostle John, He said, I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18).

Personally, I am determined to know nothing more than the Bible knows. If you have another standard, I suggest you'll find life and God and morality very confusing.

64. There is nothing wrong with trying to improve your life situation, but don't sin, don't focus on this life's short-term goals, and be sensitive to the fact that you don't know what God is doing in your life (Genesis 40:14-15).

When Joseph was in prison, he asked the cupbearer to remember him before Pharaoh when he was restored to his job, because, Joseph tells him, I was, in fact, kidnapped and I have done nothing wrong. So Joseph tried to engineer his release from prison. Clearly God had Joseph thrown into prison so He could interpret the cupbearer's dream so he would later remember him when Pharaoh had his dream, which results in Joseph's elevation to power in Egypt. If Joseph had tried to change his situation of slavery to Potiphar, it would have been against God's plan. Even after he had interpreted the dream of the cupbearer, release would be against God's plan if it was done in any situation other than

interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. And Pharaoh's dreams had to be of the first seven years, the plentiful ones. So Joseph tried to improve his life situation but did not demand it or resort to sin to do it. If, in fact, he had been remembered by the cupbearer and treated justly by Pharaoh when he requested it, Joseph would have been released and probably unavailable when Pharaoh had his dreams. He would probably be on his way back to Canaan, and the upcoming famine would have killed them all.

So it's all right to try to improve our life situation. We were created autonomous beings who will, by our very nature, try to improve our life situation. Everything done by everyone, including God, is done for personal advantage. No one, including God, is altruistic. "Jesus ... for the joy set before Him, endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). Christian self-denial is denial of the old sinful self not the new spiritual self. "Give and it will be given to you" (Mark 6:38). "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul" (Mark 8:32). "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth ... but store up for yourselves treasure in heaven" (Matthew 6:19-20). "If I give all my possessions to feed the poor ... but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3) [emphasis mine]. Clearly the Bible teaches the profit motive as a virtue. It's pantheism, not Christianity, that teaches selflessness. Selfness is a virtue. Selfishness is a perversion of that virtue which says I get my profit at the expense of others.

A second perversion is the one Jesus referred to in the Matthew 6 quote, and that's looking for profit in short-term earthly values. But when we avoid these two perversions, profit is a good, natural, basic-to-our-autonomous-creation motive.

We will naturally, apart from our sin nature, desire to improve our life situation—that's okay. But there are several things not to do! Don't demand it of God—He has you where His plan demands you to be, and you don't know what that is. (2) Don't sin. Don't get a divorce, borrow money, lie, cheat, pursue new-age type mystical solutions, gossip or seek revenge as an attempt to improve your life situation. (3) Don't try to get rich, live in luxury, or pursue other short-term, earthly, dead-end goals. On the other hand, it's okay to: (1) go to the doctor if you are sick, (2) get professional advice in technical areas of business and interpersonal relationships, and (3) ask people to help you personally and spiritually.

65. Do not allow people to give you credit for what God is doing through you—in other words, never be proud, always be humble (Genesis 41:15-16).

When Joseph was brought before Pharaoh after two full years in prison, Pharaoh said, "I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." But Joseph answered, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" [emphasis mine]. Joseph told the cupbearer and baker, "interpretations belong to God" (40:8). Joseph saw himself as an informant of God but never as a source of information. He was a stream not a lake. He simply transferred God's knowledge to people. That's what we do when we communicate the Word of God. Never accept credit for anything. That's pride. And pride is the root of all evil. Humility, on the other hand, is the root of all virtue. The difference is that with humility, value begins and ends in God. With pride, there is some independent-of-God value in people.

66. We should accept the world's promotions—as long as they don't involve sin—but remember, they are part of God's plan to be used for His glory (Genesis 41:33-45).

Joseph, it seems, did more than interpret Pharaoh's dreams. His reply to Pharaoh was in two parts. The first was a direct interpretation from God. It was revelation given to Joseph, as to a prophet (Genesis 41:25-32). The second part (41:33-36) was not part of the dream, so it seems to be Joseph's own personal advice. Joseph may have been hinting to get the job or it may be his administrative skills just blurted out what should be done. Just as he organized Potiphar's house and the prison, he sort of automatically told Pharaoh how to organize the next 14 years with five specific recommendations.

Anyway, Joseph got the job, probably the biggest promotion anyone has ever received in all of history—from a prisoner to a prime minister in one day. Joseph accepted the promotion, even though it meant working for an idolatrous Pharaoh in a pagan nation, because it did not require any sin on Joseph's part. Again, we see, as with Noah and Abraham, righteousness is centered in an individual, not in a society, and it flourishes in spite of the society. Joseph had just proven that in Potiphar's household and in prison. Now he'd prove it over the whole land.

There is a story about Napoleon which, I'm told, is true. One day Napoleon was sitting on his horse next to a couple of his generals in front of a whole field full of soldiers when his horse, for some unknown reason, became startled

and reared up on its hind legs. Immediately, a private stepped out of the ranks and grabbed the bridle, steadying the horse before Napoleon fell off. Napoleon looked down at the private and said, "Thank you ... captain." The (former) private, without hesitation, said, "Of which regiment, sir?"

Don't turn down the world's promotions—just remember, they are from God's plan and for God's glory.

67. Fruitfulness aids forgetfulness when we need to forget the problems of the past (Genesis 41:50-52).

Forgetting is an essential part of forgiving. When Joseph's sons were born, he named them Manasseh (which means "one who causes to forget") and Ephraim (which means "fruitful") because he said God has made me forget all my trouble and my father's household and God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Now, of course, Joseph didn't forget in the sense that he no longer could bring to mind the facts and details of the past. We can never erase what's been placed in our brains. But that physical impossibility was overridden by adding new thoughts and different thoughts. The thoughts which allowed Joseph to define "forgive" and "forget" concerning his brothers were twofold. In the end, the dominating difference was Joseph's perspective. You meant evil against me but God meant it for good (50:20). But in the interim, there was another factor. Joseph's fruitfulness in Egypt—in slavery, in prison, in the whole land of Egypt, and now with two children, allowed him to forget his "trouble" and his "father's household." New fruitful thoughts allow us to forget old hurtful thoughts, not in the sense that we are not able to bring them to mind but in the sense that we can choose to not do so.

68. Conversation reveals the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Genesis 42—50).

When the famine of the second seven years became severe, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for food. The struggle with Jacob, the brothers, and Joseph is revealed to us mostly by use of conversation. An account which could have been described in one chapter, takes nine. The reason it takes so long is that the author reveals it to us in verse after verse of conversation, which is completely unnecessary for the simple telling of the story. The long conversations add little to the historical narrative. But they add tons to our understanding of the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and motives of the people involved. I suggest that is why the early church meeting was a communion meal in someone's home instead of attending a "service" in an auditorium. People can preach, teach, sing, participate in skits or other presentations, and neither they nor their audience reveal much about the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Worse, those can be faked, masked, or lost in the performance. All that is different with conversations. It's easier to express our motivations, intentions, and feelings, and harder to mask them, when we are exchanging thoughts in the interactions of a mix of questions, answers, and opinions. This is what makes one-on-one discipleship so valuable, one-on-one evangelism essential, and one-on-one fellowship a survival factor.

69. Give people an occasion where they can come to grips with the reality of their sin and prove they can be trusted (Genesis 42:6-17, 21, 22, 28; 44:16).

When Joseph confronted his brothers, he accused them of being spies. They denied it, of course, and said, we are honest men (verse 11). Of course, Joseph knew they were honest about what they said, but they had not been honest with their father and his only full brother Benjamin about what they had done to Joseph. Of course, they were honest about their present situation, but how about their past sins which had never been dealt with? Joseph jerks them around by creating a situation where they are forced to go back to the sin they had never dealt with, tell the truth, and live with the consequences. We should always forgive people of their sins against us. Why? Because (1) they are really sins against God, (2) not forgiving them is a sin of our own against God, and (3) Jesus gave us the example on the cross of forgiving even those who don't ask for it. But forgiveness does not equal trust. Trust needs to be re-earned. When the previously untrustworthy people are close to us, we also have the obligation to give them an arena in which to prove their trust, even if it means forcing them to come to honesty over their past. Perhaps this is one example of what Jesus meant when He said, "if you ... remember that your brother has something against you ... first, be reconciled to your brother" (Matthew 5:23-24).

70. Give people an opportunity to grow up spiritually and morally (Genesis 44:30-34).

During their second trip to buy food from Joseph, his brothers were accused of theft because Joseph had his servant put his personal silver drinking cup in Benjamin's sack (44:2). Because of this setup, Joseph announced that he would keep Benjamin as a slave (44:10). This forced the brothers to reveal their true moral colors. Would they go back to their father and lie again about Benjamin like they had about Joseph? Judah steps to the plate and tells the truth and offers to take the rap instead of Benjamin in order to protect his father (44:31-34). This repentance brought Joseph out of the closet, and he told them who he was. From then on, he was nothing but supportive toward his broth-

ers—even when they feared he would change his mind. After their father’s death, Joseph assured them of his support. Joseph tested them, challenged them, and hassled them around until they revealed a repentant compassionate attitude.

71. Help sinners totally root out all their past sins which have not been dealt with without covering up or glossing over any of them (Genesis 44:20 and 45:9).

When Judah pleaded before Joseph for the freedom of Benjamin, he told the story of their past, making the point that the loss of Benjamin would kill their father. But Judah described the loss of Joseph as his brother is dead. They may have believed that, but it sure enough was not the whole story, and it left out the important part—namely, that they kidnapped him, sold him as a slave, and lied about it to their father. When Joseph revealed to them who he was and told them to report that to their father (45:9), they now had no other recourse but to admit to Jacob all their sin in the matter. If they didn’t, Joseph would.

Once a sin has been confessed and dealt with before some responsible body, then it can and should be dismissed from our consideration. Then it’s up to God alone to deal with it. But when it has not been dealt with, it remains a hinderance to the growth and maturity of the sinner and stands between him and those who are aware of it. Once it’s dealt with, it’s over. But glossing over it is not dealing with it.

72. Don’t let your emotions govern your decisions—don’t leave them out either (Genesis 43:30; 45:1-2; 46:29).

Joseph’s decisions were based on solid moral values. His feelings did not pervert his values. He did not let his feelings for his brothers or his father govern his devotion to doing the right thing before God. But neither did he leave them out. Joseph was aware of the dreams he had as a child (42:9). He knew God was using him to interpret dreams which placed him in a special position in the plan of God. But Joseph was also motivated by his love for his father and his brothers, especially his younger and only full brother Benjamin. Both his devotion to God and his love for his family were mingled together in Joseph’s decisions.

73. There is such a thing as a good lie—but it’s intended to be (1) short-term, (2) in order to handle a critical situation, and (3) for a greater good (Genesis 42:9, 14; 44:2-5, 15).

On two separate occasions, Joseph lied to his brothers. On their first visit, he accused them of being spies, when, of course, he knew they weren’t. On the second visit, he had his servant put his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack and told them he believed they stole it, and he used it to produce divination. Clearly Joseph didn’t believe they stole it, neither did he practice divination. These were intentional deceptions. A lie is an intent to deceive, so these were technically lies. But actually, they weren’t, if you consider the long-term intentions. Joseph did not intend to portray a lifelong deception about something no one would ever discover, which, by the way, his brothers did. For Joseph, it was a (1) short-term, (2) maneuver, (3) to bring about a greater good. He expected the truth to come out, and his maneuvering to be the basis of a greater good (50:20).

This kind of lie occurs repeatedly in the Bible. The midwives lied to Pharaoh about not killing the boy babies. Rahab lied to the local police about hiding Joshua’s spies. God told Samuel to lie about going to anoint David as king. Lying is a major part of almost every military campaign. Technically, these are lies because they constitute an intent to deceive, but they differ from Satanic sinful lies in that sinful lies are intended to be: (1) permanent, (2) an attack on the nature of truth itself as being relevant or valuable, and (3) a destruction of that which is good, and that which is good is that which reflects the character of God. There are very few occasions which call for short-term deceptions. Most people use this principle to justify their own desires. So most conservatives deny the value of any deception. That’s convenient, but it’s not biblical. The reality is, this type of lie has biblical support. But remember the three criteria. Most lies, even white lies, don’t meet them. For example, lying to customers about your delivery schedule or your friends about how you like their clothes, are just plain Satanic lies.

74. Honor your father and your mother means to take care of them financially (Genesis 47:11-12).

In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul says, the elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. But the honor he is talking about is financial. In the next verse, he refers to Deuteronomy 25:4, You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing and Leviticus 19:13, the laborer is worthy of his wages (1 Timothy 5:18). So honor is financial, physical well-being. For sure, the context of 1 Timothy is a long ways from the commandment to honor your father and your mother. But Joseph followed that physical, financial definition of “honor” when it came to his father. That’s not all he did, of course. When he saw Jacob, Joseph fell on his neck and

wept on his neck a long time (46:29, see also 50:1). But Joseph took the initiative before Pharaoh to settle his father in the land of Goshen (called Rameses) and provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food (47:12). Joseph honored his father's decision, crossing his hands and blessing Joseph's youngest son Ephraim over the older son Manasseh (48:14). Finally, Joseph honored his father's request to be buried back in the land, in the cave Abraham purchased as a tomb (49:29-30). You may recall, David also took care of his parents physically (when Saul was pursuing him) in that he moved them to Moab. We read, And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come {and stay} with you until I know what God will do for me." Then he left them with the king of Moab; and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold (1 Samuel 22:3-4). Obviously, there is a difference between obeying our parents and honoring them. Obeying is what we do as children while we are still under their care, and obeying is a part of honoring them (Ephesians 6:1-2). When we establish our own family, obedience is, or at least should be, no longer the issue. But honoring is life-long, and whatever else it means, it includes physical care.

75. When the time comes, those who have become men can decide to become family patriarchs (Genesis 50:15-21).

Only men who have proven themselves to be faithful to God over many years are available to become patriarchs of an extended family. After his father died, his brothers feared Joseph would get revenge. But Joseph told them, "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:21). Joseph took care of his family and his extended family. He didn't replace Jacob. No one can replace a patriarch. When a patriarch dies, an era is over and a new one must begin. No one can appoint a patriarch. He is not necessarily the firstborn or the wealthiest. A patriarch is a spiritual given who is tuned to God and available to his extended family. When such a man emerges, a new era begins.

76. The ultimate perspective is to see life from God's point of view (Genesis 50:20).

We might call it 50/20 vision. It's better than 20/20 vision. It's not just seeing what is there but seeing what is there from God's point of view. Genesis 50:20 is the most important verse, the most significant thing Joseph said. Let's read it. "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

