

The Real Prosperity Gospel

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Series: Genesis

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Genesis 26**. We are in a series going systematically through the book of Genesis. We are looking now at the walk of faith in the life of Abraham's son Isaac. We see today how God prosper's Isaac. The title of the message is "The Real Prosperity Gospel".

This morning we're going to look at a 4,000-year-old family at some of their lowest points and some of their most grievous sins, and we're going to go right into their home and right into their head, and we're going to learn through them.

Now as we launch in, today you're going to learn a lot about a gentleman named Isaac. His dad was Abraham. His mom was Sarah. He was married at about the age of 40 to his wife, Rebekah, who we will meet today. She gave birth to his twin sons, Jacob and Esau, when Isaac was about 60. We'll learn more about those boys next week.

In Genesis 26, God opens up this man's life, and He gives us five snapshots of the most difficult aspects of his life. The snapshots of difficulty are ways in which Isaac is conformed to be the man God wants him to be – a man of faith.

There is a false teaching today that teaches that God doesn't want Christians to have difficulties. He wants you to be comfortable. God is glad when you are rich and materialistic. But that kind of teaching is nothing more than paganism. That reminds me of a very strange phenomenon that happened during the Second World War.

The Cargo Cults

One of the most unusual legacies of World War II has is what has become known as the cargo cults of the **South Pacific**. The islanders of the islands scattered from Australia to Indonesia had been cut off completely from modern civilization. They were first exposed to **modern technologies** through the allied armed forces during World War II.

The American military, in particular, often used the remote islands in the South Pacific as sites for temporary landing strips and supply depots.

We were all over the South Pacific on remote little islands with our landing strips and our supply depots so that we could keep our armies well supplied. So when Americans arrived to these little islands, they met the island people, and they came bringing cargo. They arrived in these miraculous looking vehicles that dropped out from the sky called airplanes. The American military created these airstrips so they could fly larger equipment in there. They brought in huge warehouses full of cargo. And **when the war ended**, they left as quickly as they came in.

The tribal people had absolutely no opportunity to learn the ways of civilization, but for a brief moment they saw high technology up close. Cargo planes would swoop in from the sky, they would land, they would unload their payload and then takeoff.

- Natives who lived in the bush all of a sudden saw cigarette lighters that produced fire instantly and they believed it to be miraculous.

- They saw large machines come in and a path through the forest, cutting down clumps of giantuan trees in one fell swoop.
- They went all the way from not even having a wheel or a cart to seeing a Jeep, modern weaponry, refrigerators, radios, talking boxes, power tools, and many varieties of food in all kinds of cans and jars.

They were fascinated by all of that and many of those tribal people concluded that the military men were gods. When the war was over and the troops were gone tribesmen built shrines to the cargo gods.

Their temples were perfect replicas of cargo planes, control towers and airplane hangers; they made them out of bamboo and woven material. These structures looked almost identical to the control towers and planes themselves, but they were really nonfunctional; all they were was shrines or temples to the cargo gods.

Even to this day, on some of those remote islands the cargo cults still thrive. They venerate religious relics like Zippo lighters, cameras, eyeglasses, ballpoint pens, nuts and bolts, and so on.

Today, missionaries have gone to the areas where *cargo cults* have flourished, and of course they receive a very warm reception at first because the cargo cultists believe they are something like the second coming. But soon the missionaries are disappointed because these people are looking for **cargo** not the **Gospel**, and missionaries say they find it very difficult to penetrate the materialism that is the essence of the cargo cults.

In recent years the Charismatic movement has spawned its own variety of cargo cult. It is called the word of faith movement. It's know by many titles: name it and claim it theology – the health, wealth, and prosperity teaching – and the prosperity Gospel.

This modern false teaching is no different than the worship of materialism that the island people of the South Pacific people practice. They worship *things*. The prosperity Gospel is no Gospel at all.

There is only one Gospel, and it is the only one that prospers us.

The Gospel

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God sent His Son to bear the eternal justice and wrath of God in the place of sinners who put their trust in Him. To have the riches of Christ's righteousness is to be truly rich.

Today, we will see the **prosperity** of Isaac. Interestingly, we see that his true prosperity lies beyond the blessings of his present life. I think you are going to be surprised.

- Paul says in **2 Corinthians 8:9**, “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was **rich**, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”
- James tells us that in **James 2:5**, that God has “chosen those who are **poor in the world to be rich in faith** and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?”

What is prosperity for the believer? It is that we are rich in faith. It is that we are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Just like the islanders who worshipped the cargo planes, you mimmick what you worship. They were making everything into the image of cargo planes.

As Christians we are to be molded into the image of Jesus Christ.

There are five molds in this passage that God uses in our lives to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. These things bring us into the riches of Christ. This is the true prosperity Gospel.

Have you ever seen a potter's wheel? As we talk about "the Real Prosperity Gospel" I want to talk about five potter's wheels for Christlikeness. God squeezes us and puts immense pressure on us in life not because He is cruel, but because He is using those things to conform us to Christ.

We see these five difficulties in the life of Isaac in Genesis 26 that grow Isaac's faith.

#1 – Places

#2 – Pressures

#3 – Particular Failures

#4 – Prosperity

#5 – Personal Conflicts

And then he tells us what we should be doing throughout!

– **Praising God**

True prosperity in the Gospel is not defined by materialism and health, but by conformity to Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate blessing of God. The greatest riches that God could give us is to make us like Christ. Let us be RICH in faith!

I. **#1 – God prospers us with Places** (vs. 1-3).

–Don't go to Egypt, stay in the promise land

Genesis 26:1–3 (ESV) — “Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.””

Context: Isaac through faith had the same promises that His father Abraham had.

- *I will be with you*
- *I will bless you*
- *I will give you all these lands*

But what did he need to do? “Do not go down to Egypt” -Stay in the Promised Land!

Life will bring you to many places. Serve God faithfully in all of them.

Thank you for where I am right now!

“I’m going to obey and serve the Lord where ever He puts me”

A. **Serve** God where He has placed you (vs. 3).

God says: “Stay in this place...and I will bless you” (Genesis 26:3).

The Lord said to Isaac, “Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you” (Gen 26:3). There is a place where the Lord wants you to dwell. Many people flit about like bees in a garden, gathering bits of pollen here and there, but never experiencing the fullness of God’s blessing – nor the peace that comes with it.

Though we are pilgrims, we are not nomads. We have a place assigned to us by our Lord. Acts 17:26 (ESV) — “[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place”. God picks the place you live. Can’t sell your house? God has more to do with that than you can imagine! You are where you are today because God wants you there.

God’s blessing for Isaac were preconditioned upon him dwelling in the specific land where God had placed him.

To illustrate this further:

- Remember **Elijah**, whom God sent to stay by the brook Cherith, “I have commanded the ravens to feed you there” (1 Kings 17:4).
- Remember **King Solomon** invited the beloved Shulamite to the garden vineyards, saying, “there will I give thee my love” (Song 7:12).
- **Esther** was in Persia as a Jew person in a foreign land “for such a time as this”.
- **Joseph** was in the prison when Pharaoh called him up to interpret his dream. Had he not “walked through the valley of the shadow of death” in the pit and into Potipher’s house and into the prison, he would never have been brought into the palace.

The places in our lives are ordained by God’s almighty sovereign hand to conform us to Christ.

In each of these the **PLACE** is important. Had they gone to any other place but that which was appointed – they would be on their own. Are you in the PLACE where the Lord wants you to be?

B. Do not go where God has not **called** you (vs. 2).

Verse 2, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.

There are some places a Christian should never go. We should never go to a place where we will compromise our testimony. We should flee from places of temptation. Remember Joseph? He fled from Potiphar's house when Mrs. Potiphar tempted him.

Here's the true prosperity Gospel: True prosperity is having a close walk with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

Isaac could not walk in Egypt and at the same time walk with God. You cannot walk in darkness and at the same time walk with Christ!

Thank God for places in life that conform us to Christ!

II. **#2 – God prospers us with Pressures** (vs. 3-8; Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 12:9).

—God sends many pressures to test our faith and to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Life will bring you through many pressures and trials. Be pure and faithful.

Thank you God for the pressures and for your sufficient grace!

“I'm going to trust God for His grace not to give in to temptation

Genesis 26:3–8 (ESV) — God says to Isaac, “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance.”

God allowed serious pressure in the life of Isaac. He tells Isaac to stay in the Promised Land, which he did. But there was a famine there. That's difficult. Then when he settles in the mountains of Gerar, he settles by neighbors that are very intimidating, and He feels like he is in danger. Isaac is afraid that the men there will kill him to get his beautiful wife, Rebekah. So he lies, saying that ***Rebekah is his sister***.

Like Father Like Son

Where do you suppose he got this idea? A glance back in the pages of Scripture show that Isaac's father, Abraham, did exactly the same thing – TWICE! And one of times was at this very place, when Abimelech was King! (see Gen.12:10-13 and Gen.20:1-5).

There's an old adage that goes, “Like father, like son.” Isaac was repeating the wrong patterns he learned from his father; patterns that limited him from being who God wanted him to be, and from experiencing the blessings God wanted him for him. Is it possible that you may be doing the same thing?

Common Pressures

Pressure of financial ruin

- **Fear of financial ruin.** Gotta forsake the assembly so I can work.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) — “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

What is your god? Do you think your work can always supply all your needs? You are wrong. If your work is your god, you’ve got the wrong god. Let me tell you about my God. **Philippians 4:19** (KJV) — “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Pressure of physical harm or danger

- You may be a single mom, and at times you are paralyzed by the fear of physical harm. You feel alone and vulnerable in situations that at times make you feel unsafe. Isaac felt unsafe too. And what did he choose? He feared man and it caught him in a snare.

Proverbs 29:25 (ESV) — “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.”

Isaac, by his own admission, was afraid of what the men of that place might do to him in order to have Rebekah. His fear of men over-ruled his faith in God; he did not trust the Lord to protect him. Just like his father.

There are many pressures in life .

There are the pressures of difficult relationships.

- Perhaps you have difficulty with your **mom** or **dad**.
- Perhaps its your **children**.
- Perhaps you are dying some days because you are in a period in your **marriage** that is trying you. You thought you were doing well spiritually until you got married.

There are the pressures of illness and sickness.

Here is the hope of the real prosperity Gospel: **Romans 8:28–30** (ESV) — “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

From justification to glorification there is the path of sanctification. And like a vessel on the potter’s wheel, God is using pressure in your life to conform you to Christ!

The message of the Gospel is not that Jesus died to give you a happy, carefree prosperous life! The message of the Gospel is that Jesus bore the wrath of God that He might

redeem you. It's not a life of ease and comfort. He's going to send whatever pressures He needs so that you will know you cannot save yourself. He'll send whatever impossible difficulties in your life to conform you to Christ.

Like a chisel that hits and cuts into a piece of marble to create a wonderful masterpiece, God has created you in Christ Jesus as His masterpiece.

Thank God for the pressures in your life, because as He told Paul, **2 Corinthians 12:9** (ESV) — “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

That's the true prosperity gospel! **Thank God for pressures that conform us to Christ!**

III. # 3 – God prospers us with Particular failures

(vs. 8-11; Lk. 5:32).

Verses 8-11, “When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with [caressing, kissing] Rebekah his wife. 9 So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’ ” 10 Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” 11 So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

So this pagan king catches Isaac kissing his so called sister, and immediately Isaac's lie is found out!

It seems that this pagan king is more righteous than the Son of Promise! He's more righteous than God's own child.

Grace is not fair, it is extravagantly forgiving

That's the thing about grace. Grace is not fair. Grace is the extravagance of God's mercy. It has nothing to do with your works. It has nothing to do with your behavior. Until you get that you cannot be saved.

What happens when sin abounds? Great super abounds! We are not antinomian lawless people, but we believe that grace abounds when you sin. It's yours. If we are commanded to forgive 70 times 7, then God will forgive you infinitely more than that!

Sometimes God decides to put our sins on display.

God decided that Isaac's sin would be put on display. Here we have a pagan Philistine king with more of a conscience than this person who is supposed to be godly. We have no record of Isaac's immediate repentance, but I believe it is implied because he is later on worshipping the Lord and the Lord is pleased.

I believe that the Lord at times allows us to fail miserably and to feel our sins. It is particularly painful to make progress in the Christian life and then backslide. Have you been there? You thought you were farther along in your walk with Christ, and then you fall and fail and it hurts.

You've been working on your tongue, and you say something that cuts someone and you are ashamed. You've been endeavoring to submit to God in a friendship or a marriage relationship, and you hurt the one you would never want to hurt.

You've been growing in Christ and becoming more faithful in your commitment to the Body of Christ, but the pressure comes and you lose your focus and you start backsliding.

Can I say that the Gospel is not for the righteous. Jesus said in **Luke 5:32**, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Thank God for the particular failures in our life that help us to remember that salvation is by grace and not by works. **Thank God that even our failures conform us to Christ!**

IV. **#4 - God prospers us with Prosperity** (vs. 12-16).

-Deep Suffering before blessing (Paul, Joseph); "I want to be blessed"

In life you will often experience prosperity and blessings. Don't get proud. They are not because of you, but in spite of you. Blessings ought not make us proud. They ought to make us fear God.

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

Here's the real prosperity Gospel. We are all irreparably wicked. God must save us. He must step in. And in spite of all our iniquity, He grants eternal life. All that you have is a result of the blood of Christ. All that anyone has is because of the blood of Jesus.

Thank God for the things you take for granted!

Grace is not about what is fair. It's about God's mercy. All the good things you experience are all from God not because of you but in spite of you.

V. **#5 – Personal Conflicts** (vs. 17-22; Eph. 4:31-32).

Thank God for conflicts that give opportunity for you to respond in conformity to Christ!

Life will bring you to many stubborn people. But the most stubborn is who? It's you! Thank God for the grace of forgiveness and closure.

“They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good”

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

Rehoboth means ROOM. So God makes room for Isaac somewhere else and blesses him, and blesses his family with fruitfulness.

Conflicts are a Rehoboth – they show us how much ROOM we have to grow!

–Ephesians 4 – There are personal conflicts in family, in marriage, in church. God has rigged it. You often want to change other people, but God wants you to love and accept others, and He wants to change you!

Ephesians 4:31–32 (ESV) — “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

In Isaac's story we learn that the envious Philistines decided to sabotage Isaac's blessings by “stopping up the wells” which had been dug in the time of Abraham. And the king himself said, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”(vs.16).

Isaac moved to another part of Gerar (the land where God told him to say) and dug some more wells. The herdsmen of the Philistines contended with him over water rights, and they plugged up his wells again. So, Isaac dug another well, and they plugged that one, too. So, Isaac dug another well – and, yes, they plugged that one also.

That's when perseverance kicked in. Isaac dug another, and another, and another, and another – until he simply outlasted the resolve of the Philistines who were trying to stop him.

Finally, Isaac's enemies began to respect him.

25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well. 26 When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, 27 Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 **In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths.** And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

The Bible says, **Genesis 26:22** (ESV) — And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Sometimes you have to "hang in there like a hair in a biscuit in a cheap restaurant!" Perseverance in a righteous cause will always outlast the wicked; they will be ashamed and defeated, while you will be blessed and honored.

VI. In everything give Praise & Worship to God (vs. 23-35).

–This ought to be our response to everything.

What ever life brings, praise Him in all of it. This ought to be the one constant in our lives. From places to pressures to prosperity to personal conflicts, there ought to be the rhythm of a heartbeat of praise!

Look at verses 23-35, "From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well. 26 When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, 27 Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 **In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths.** And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

Verses 32 -35, 32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." 33 He called it **Shibah**; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. 34 When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, 35 **and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.**"

Does the conflict stop? No! Does Isaac take things into his own hands? No! He just praises and worships God. And through His strength, Isaac has strength.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV) — "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

You have everything you need to live a life conformed to Christ in obedience to God's will.

Build your altar at the place where you are, and worship Him alone – first and always. Then make sure your home is where this altar abides; that God's presence and blessing are in your house. And then, only then, dig your wells – that is to say, seek to flourish in the work of your hands and the prosperity that God brings to your labors.

Conclusion: As you grow in holiness, you will become more like Christ. This is the true prosperity Gospel!