

FOUR EASY WAYS TO WRECK YOUR LIFE AND RUIN YOUR FUTURE (Genesis 15, 17)

You've heard it said that pessimists view the glass as half empty while optimists see the glass as half full. I don't think of myself as either a pessimist or an optimist. Instead, I consider myself to be a realist who happens to have a positive outlook. I see the glass as having just enough water to quench my thirst. That's what I see.

I have learned that a positive outlook runs in my veins, literally. My blood type is B+, and that's what I seek to be. I am usually positive, even when the circumstances don't seem to warrant such a rosy outlook.

My positivity effects how I approach Scripture and how I preach it. Let me give you an example. Years ago, I preached through the Ten Commandments devoting one sermon to each command. Eight of the ten are stated negatively; they tell us what not to do. Only two are written positively—*Remember the Sabbath Day* and *Honor your father and mother*.

When I preached through each ten, however, I chose to state all of them positively. The message of Commandment #1 is, "Put God First," followed by "Worship God Truly," and "Revere God's Name." Other sermons were "Cherish the Gift of Life," "Practice Purity," "Respect What Belongs to Others," "Why Honesty Is the Best Policy," and the sermon on the last commandment was "Be Content."

Every negative carries with it a positive, and every positive has within it a negative. In other words, when we are told what not to do, we can easily see what we should pursue, and when we are told what we should do, we can figure out what we should avoid.

I am going to go against the grain of my personality with today's message, and preach a message counter to how I usually approach a text. Abraham's life usually serves as a positive example. In most cases, we should do as Abraham did. He did what was right, and God blessed him greatly. I am going to encourage you to do what Abraham did, but I am going to go through the back door to get there.

I have entitled this message, "Four Easy Ways to Wreck Your Life and Ruin Your Future." If you really want to mess up your life, I am going to show you how. The secret to wrecking your life and ruining your future is not doing four things that Abraham did.

Easy Way #1: Disbelieve What God Has Promised.

If you want to put your life on a destructive trajectory, don't believe what God has promised in His Word.

Look with me at Genesis 15:1-6. We touched on these verses two weeks ago, but I want to revisit them. Abram was 75 when God called him to go the land He would show him. At that same time, God promised to make of him a great nation. To be the father of a nation, you must start by fathering at least one male child. At this time, Abram has no children. He was 75; his wife was 65. By the time we get to Genesis 15, some years have passed, and neither Abram nor his wife are getting any younger, and Abram is getting a little antsy, a little impatient.

Do you ever get impatient with God? “Come on, God. Let’s speed things up a bit.”

God calms Abram down and reassures him by repeating and elaborating on His former promise. “Yes, Abram. You will have an heir. In fact, your offspring will be as numerous as the stars above your head.”

Verse 6 tells us what Abram did in response. He believed God. If you want to make a mess of your life, don’t do what Abram did. Instead, disbelieve what God has clearly promised.

Getting us to disbelieve what God has said has been Satan’s strategy from the very beginning. All the way back in the Garden of Eden, the serpent asked Eve, “Did God really say?” He wanted to sow doubt in Eve’s heart and mind as to what God had said.

Do you ever find yourself doubting whether what we read in this book is really true? Is God really a God of love? Are His intentions really good? Is He really all powerful because if He is, in fact, loving and truly powerful, why doesn’t He stop tragedies before they happen? Some pray, “Why did You let my child die? Why did You allow my spouse to leave me? Why did You permit my business to fail?” If God is really loving and all-powerful, why does He allow bad things happen to good people?

Answering that question goes beyond the goal of this message, but let me just say at this point that the way that question is worded is badly flawed. Whoever said we are good people? We may think we are good people. Others may view us as good people? But if you and I were really honest, we would have to confess that there is a great deal of stuff below the surface of our lives that is nasty, that is polluted, that is dishonoring to God. We are not as good as we pretend.

You and I are fallen people living in a fallen world. Our world has fallen off the rails, and it’s not God’s fault; it is ours. Please know that God has promised to restore this world to His original intention, but that won’t happen until Jesus comes back, and He hasn’t come back yet.

If you disbelieve God’s promises that Jesus is returning, and that God will create a new heaven and a new earth where the curse is reversed, and His purposes will prevail, you will become cynical, disillusioned, and discouraged; you will have no heart to persevere in seeking and obeying God.

Paul urged the believers in the churches of Galatia, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (6:9).

Sadly, those who disbelieve God’s promises will give up, and they will forfeit the great harvest they could have had otherwise.

Quite often, we want to believe, we just need helping believing. That was even the case with Abram. Look at 15:7-8. God was willing to oblige. He wanted to help Abram believe; so, He formalized a covenant between Himself and Abram. A covenant is an agreement; it is a contract. In Abram’s day there were four different kinds of contracts—a verbal covenant, a shoe covenant, a salt covenant, and a blood covenant. Let me walk through those quickly.

First, a **verbal covenant** was a contract based on the spoken word. Very simply, one party would promise to do a certain thing, and the other person would promise to do something else. There was a day in our country when a man’s word was his bond. You could seal your verbal promises with a handshake. There was no need for lawyer and written contracts. Sadly, that day is long gone.

The second covenant was a **shoe covenant** in which both parties would take off their sandals and exchange them with one another. This was a binding agreement.

The third type of covenant was a **salt covenant**. In that day, people wore a little bag of salt tied to their belt. A salt covenant consisted of each party taking a pinch of salt from their bag of salt and placing it in the salt bag of the other person. Each party would shake his salt bag thus mixing his salt with the salt of the other person. Since it was impossible to separate out whose salt was whose, each person was bound to fulfill the agreement they had made.

The fourth type of covenant was a **blood covenant**. This was the most binding covenant. It is described in vv. 9-11. The two parties would lock arms and walk between the halved animals. As they did so, they were in effect saying, “May I suffer the same fate of these animals if I do not fulfill my vows to you.”

In this case, Abram did not walk between the pieces of the halved animals because he could not bring to pass what God had promised. Instead, God put Abram into a deep sleep (v. 12). He reaffirmed and elaborated on His promise to Abram (vv. 13-16). Then, God ratified His promise to Abram. Look with me at vv. 17-18. God used objects to signify His presence—a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. As these objects passed through the sacrificed animals, God was pledging to make good on His promises.

We are taught in the NT that God has made a blood covenant with all those who will trust His Son. This covenant is symbolized in the Lord’s Supper. The bread reminds us of His body that was broken for us, and the wine reminds us of His blood that was shed for us. What are we to do? We are told in John 3:16 that our job is to believe.

Have you turned from whatever you have been trusting in—your goodness, your religious observances, your acts of service—and you have placed your full weight upon Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

If you want to destroy your present, your future, and your eternity, then just keep on believing in yourself.

If you want to wreck your life and ruin your future, there is a second thing you can do.

Easy Way #2: Disregard What God Has Promised.

Abram wanted what God had promised him. He desired a child desperately. He was well-advanced in years and had no heir to carry on his name. Also, Abram was a wandering man from Mesopotamia. He lived here and there. He had no land to call his own. He wanted what God had promised.

Do you really want what God has promised? Do you want forgiveness, eternal life, the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, a home in heaven?

The problem that plagues many is they want what the world offers more than what God offers. The shiny things of the world hold more allure, are more attractive to them than what God has promised. Truth be told, not everything God has promised is desirable. God has also promised persecution, mistreatment, and suffering.

We want the crown, but we don’t want the cross. Charles Spurgeon warned, “There will be no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers on earth.”

Plainly speaking, we want what the world has to offer more than what God has to offer.”

We read in Psalm 106 that God's people wandered in the desert because of their unbelief. Eugene Peterson rendered vv. 14-15 of that psalm in this way, "They only cared about pleasing themselves in that desert, provoked God with their insistent demands. He gave them exactly what they asked for—but along with it they got an empty heart."

The KJV translates v. 15 in this way: "And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

One of the worst things God can do for you is to give you what you want.

Consider Abraham's grandchildren—Jacob and Esau. Paul in Romans 9 quotes something that was written in Malachi 1. It is a shocking statement God made. He said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Those are strong words. Why did God love Jacob but hate Esau? I don't know that I can answer that fully, but I can show you a chief difference between Jacob and Esau. Jacob wanted to be blessed. He wanted to be blessed by his father, so much so that he tricked his father into blessing him by pretending to be his brother. Years later, he found himself wrestling with a stranger at night. I believe that unnamed figure was the pre-incarnate Son of God. Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." You can read the story in the closing verses of Genesis 32. In the end, the Man with whom Jacob wrestled blessed him, but he also wounded him. Jacob limped the rest of his life.

God blesses and wounds those He loves. If that is how God treats those He loves, what does He do with those He hates? You might think that God would make the lives of those He hates miserable. Not so. Genesis 36 tells us of Esau's wives, his children, his possessions being great, and his livestock being numerous. He left the land of Canaan and went across the Jordan to Edom, settled there, and prospered. From his lineage, kings arose in the land of Edom long before kings reigned in Israel.

What is more is that we are told of no deficit that afflicted Esau. God didn't wound him in anyway. God left him alone.

You and I have a choice to make. We can seek the blessing of the world or the blessing of God. The blessings of this world are time bound. They don't outlast us. God's blessings, however, are eternal. Whatever lack we experience in this world will be more than made up for in the next.

Are you going to be a Jacob or an Esau? Are you going to contend and strive with God, or are you going to go your own way and show no interest in the things of God? If you choose the latter, things may go swimmingly well for you, but you have no idea what you are forfeiting by doing so.

Easy Way #3: Don't Wait for What God Has Promised.

God promised Abram a son, and God promised that He would give his descendants a land. That is why we call it the Promised Land. Neither of those promises, however, were fulfilled immediately. In fact, they were long in coming. When Abram didn't have a son in what he thought was a sufficient length of time, he took matters into his own hands. We are told in Genesis 16 how he tried to help God out. He fathered a child through someone not his wife. God was not pleased. As far as we can tell, 13 years of silence followed. There is a span of 13 years between Genesis 16 and 17. Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born. He was 99 when God spoke to him again.

Look at 17:1. God reveals Himself to Abram under a new name. God identifies Himself as *El Shaddai*. That name is translated as *God Almighty*. God is saying to Abram, “I am sufficient to accomplish what I desire. You don’t have to help Me out. I’ve got things covered. All I want is for you to walk before Me in obedience.”

One man commented, “God’s Word often refers to the Christian life and experience as a walk, seldom as a run, and never as a mad dash.”

We are to walk calmly and reverently before the Lord. The Bible teaches we are to walk **before** God (His watchcare), **with** God (His companionship), **after** God (His leadership), and **in** God (His indwelling).

Vance Havner was born in 1901 and died in 1986. He was saved at age 10, licensed to preach at 12, ordained at age 15, and he preached the Word of God for more than 70 years. During his many years of Christian service, he wrote some 40 books. Let me give you a couple of Vance Havner quotes:

- God isn’t a talent scout looking for someone who is “good enough” or “strong enough.” He is looking for someone with a heart set on Him, and He will do the rest.
- Simply wait on God. So doing, we shall be directed, supplied, protected, corrected, and rewarded.

But, if you really want to make a mess of things, I have a different message for you. Don’t wait for God, forge ahead on your own. Trust your instincts. Make your own way in this world. Keep your own counsel.

William Carey is regarded as the father of the modern missions movement. He once said, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.” But friend, if we fail to wait on God, our future will be exceedingly dark.

Let’s look at one last way to wreck our lives and ruin our future.

Easy Way #4: Disobey What God Commands.

There are two broad categories of covenants. There are what we call unconditional covenants. In an unconditional covenant, God simply announces, “This is what I am going to do.” He does not base it on our behavior or our response. The New Covenant is an unconditional covenant. God announced the New Covenant back in Ezekiel 36:26-27. Listen to what He said:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

We have not obeyed our way into the New Covenant. God has shown us grace. The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, is all about God’s grace, not our performance.

But then, there are conditional covenants. Conditional covenants routinely come in the form of “If . . . then” statements. God says, “If you will do this, then I will do that.”

Here in Genesis 17, God reconfirms to Abram what He is going to do, but Abram has

a part to play. His role is to obey. Look at vv. 1-8. At this point, God changes Abram's name to Abraham. *Abram* means "exalted father," but *Abraham* means "father of many."

In vv. 9-10, God calls upon Abraham and all the males in his household to do something. They were to be circumcised.

Look at vv. 26-27. Two things stand out concerning Abraham's obedience. His obedience was immediate, and his obedience was complete. He obeyed God as soon as he was able, and he did everything God commanded.

That is what God wants from you and me. He wants our immediate and complete obedience. Delayed obedience is disobedience, and partial obedience is also disobedience.

Honestly, our obedience is often delayed. God shows us something in His word. He whispers to our ears what He wants us to do, and we think about it. We weigh it. We consider it. Maybe we ask for a sign. Maybe we look for confirmation in some way or another. Maybe, in the end we actually do what He said.

When I ask Lance to take out the trash. He doesn't ponder the implications of what that means. He doesn't ask for a sign as to whether he really should. He just takes out the trash.

In the same way, we should do what God tells us as soon as He tells us and leave nothing undone as to what He said. God blesses that kind of obedience.

But, if you are looking to screw up your life and forfeit God's blessings—His present blessings and His future ones—ignore what He has told you to do. Pretend you didn't hear. Get so busy and so preoccupied with your own life and your own plans that you don't have time to do what He wants.

In Galatians 6, Paul tells us both the results of obedience and disobedience. Listen to how Eugene Peterson put it in his paraphrase of the NT.

⁷⁻⁸ Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

He was born in Tulsa, OK. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1955. Radio broadcasting was his business for more than 60 years during which time he received numerous awards. If you are like me, you miss Paul Harvey. I want to read you a something he broadcast back in 1965. That was 58 years ago. You would think Harvey was a prophet because it sounds like it was written yesterday.

If I were the devil ... If I were the Prince of Darkness, I'd want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I'd have a third of its real estate, and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn't be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree — Thee. So I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. I'd subvert the churches first — I'd begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: "Do as you please."

To the young, I would whisper that “The Bible is a myth.” I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what’s bad is good, and what’s good is “square.” And the old, I would teach to pray, after me, “Our Father, which art in Washington...”

And then I’d get organized. I’d educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I’d threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I’d pedal narcotics to whom I could. I’d sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I’d tranquilize the rest with pills.

If I were the devil I’d soon have families at war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves; until each in its turn was consumed. And with promises of higher ratings I’d have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. If I were the devil I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions — just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you’d have to have drug sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door.

Within a decade I’d have prisons overflowing, I’d have judges promoting pornography — soon I could evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls, and church money. If I were the devil I’d make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle.

If I were the devil I’d take from those who have, and give to those who want until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious.

And what do you bet I could get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich? I would caution against extremes and hard work, in Patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on the TV is the way to be. And thus, I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure. In other words, if I were the devil I’d just keep right on doing what he’s doing.

Paul Harvey, good day.

You can help the devil wreck your life and ruin your future by doing nothing. Don’t settle for that. Believe God. Desire what He has promised. Wait for Him. Finally, obey Him. Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.