



## **TWENTY MILES SHORT**

### **Genesis 28**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Genesis 28. Let me encourage you, as the Lord speaks to us this morning, to write down what He speaks to you and really dive into the study of Scripture.

We're obviously here this morning on the Sunday after Christmas, which is always an interesting Sunday. There is always a variety of people who are out of town, and there is always a variety of people in town visiting friends and family. Often times, there is lower attendance in worship on the Sunday after Christmas. In fact, there are a number of churches that don't even meet together on the Sunday after Christmas. They don't gather together for worship because of these different factors. Often times, even when churches do gather together for worship, it's almost this kind of, "We're going to get through this Sunday and then get to the real stuff at the beginning of next year" mentality; this "coast-it-through this Sunday after Christmas" mentality.

I want you to know this is not the plan this morning. We have gathered together to exalt the wonder of Christ and listen to the Word of Christ. I am convinced there is not one person in this room that is here by accident this morning. I believe God has brought us here, and I believe He has a word for us here. I believe God wants to speak to us, and He wants to do some incredible things in our lives this morning.

From the very beginning of our time in God's Word, I want you to know where this is headed. At the end of this time, we will have the opportunity to respond to His Word in prayer, to respond to His Word in repentance, and to respond to His Word by letting Christ through His grace change our lives. We're not going to coast through this thing.

Next week, we are going to begin a journey looking forward to the first few weeks of 2008. We're going to be looking at how to make our lives count in 2008. What I would like for us to do this morning is to look backwards. I want to challenge you this morning to think about the present state of your commitment to Christ. Maybe this last year or maybe these last few months or maybe these last few weeks, whatever it is, I want you to think about the present state of your commitment to Christ. Have you made Him Lord of your life? I am convinced there is a heresy that has crept into the church that is rampant today; the idea that you can trust Christ as your Savior but not surrender to Him and follow Him as your Lord.

I was reading a report from the Barna Research Group...and I'll even give this caveat before I share some of what that report was. I've got some concerns and qualms about how polls define born-again Christians. I think that is part of the problem that needs to be addressed here. This poll is taken of Evangelical Christians and basically found the majority of Americans...and you've heard this before...at least call themselves Christians. But when asked to describe their commitment to Christ, about half of those Christians said they were

absolutely committed to Christ and the other half responded either moderately or less committed to Christ. Barna commented...he said this,

These figures emphasize how soft the commitment to God is. American's are willing to extend some energy in religious activity, such as attending church or reading the Bible. They are also willing to throw some money in the offering basket. And because of such activity, they convince themselves they are a people of genuine faith. But when it comes to truly establishing their priorities and making a tangible commitment to knowing and loving God and allowing Him to change their character and lifestyle, most people stop short. We want to be spiritual, and we want to have God's favor, but we're not sure we want Him taking control of our lives and messing with the image and outcome we've worked so hard to produce.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is heresy, and it is common place in the church today. The idea that moderate commitment to Christ is acceptable to God is a lie. There are many Christians, and I'm guessing even many people in this room, who believe that. I know there is a tendency at this point to think "Well, Dave, not every Christian can be absolutely committed to Christ. Some people just aren't ready for this kind of commitment yet. They are still journeying, so it's okay to say they are moderately or less committed to Christ." I want to submit to you this morning that if you are 95% committed to Christ, then you are not committed to Christ at all.

Now before you think, "Well, not everybody is perfect. We can't be 100% committed to Christ", let me ask you this question: What if I told you this morning I was 95% committed to my precious wife Heather but 5% of my life I gave to another woman. What would you say about me? Answer this: If my wife deserves 100%, then where in the world have we gotten the idea that our God is worthy of anything less than 100%? Absolute total commitment to Christ; this is what our God demands, but not just demands, He deserves this! Anything less than absolute commitment to Christ is a paltry offering to an infinitely, holy, majestic, mighty and worthy God.

So, I want to ask you this morning about the present state of your own commitment to Christ. I want to ask you, "Where are you stopping short?" Don't miss it. The worst mistake we can make this morning is to think this sermon is for somebody else. Where are you stopping short?

I want us to let Jacob in the Old Testament help us understand a little bit about what it means to stop short. Come to Genesis 28, and the context is this: Isaac has had two sons, Jacob and Esau. In Genesis 27, Jacob gets Esau's blessing. The blessing that Esau thought he was going to get, Jacob gets. Esau is not very happy. In fact, Esau says, "As soon as I finish mourning here for my father, I am going to kill my brother Jacob." It is at that point that Jacob decides it's time for him to take a vacation. So, he decides he's going to leave where he lives, and he's going to go visit his uncle up at a place called Haran. He checks out and leaves and goes off by himself.

That's where we pick up in Genesis 28:10. Listen to what it says.

*Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the*

*LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

Now, let's pause there for a second. That is one stout promise! Commitments from God to Jacob! He said this to Jacob, and He said this to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15. He said this to Isaac in Genesis 26. Now, in Genesis 28, He says, "I'm going to bless your family, and your descendants are going to be like the dust of the earth; they are going to spread out from the west to the east, from north to the south. All peoples on earth are going to be blessed through you and your offspring." Now, that's a pretty stout promise when you realize Jacob is a single guy at this point. This is good news for a single man. He is not only going to have a wife; he's going to have people everywhere coming from his family. This is a major promise to him. He is going to have the land on which he's lying and sleeping right there.

So, listen to what happens in verse 16.

*When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."*

*Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.*

*Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."*

So, here's what happens: Jacob receives this commitment, this promise from God, and so he returns with a vow to God and says, "This stone that I have set up is going to be God's house." I want you to look at a map with me on the screen here that will help us understand the geography of what is going on. If you look down where all those cities are, you see Bethel. You see it down in the southwestern corner of this map. Then, you look up in the northeastern corner and you see Haran. That's where Jacob is headed.

So, he is there at Bethel, he has this dream, and God makes these promises to him. Jacob says, "Here is the stone that I've set up and this place is going to be God's house. After I go on my journey to Haran, I'm going to come back here to Bethel." That's when God says to him, "I'll bring you back to this place," and Jacob says to God, "I'll come back to this place." So, he journeys up to Haran, then he comes back.

I want you to see with me this morning a few lessons that Jacob learned on this journey. Lesson one: He learned that sin is subtle. I want you to fast forward with me twenty years, all the way over to Genesis 33:18. Approximately twenty years go by, Jacob gets his family. He has wives, he has sons, he has a daughter, and he's coming back. Just

like God had said, "I'm going to bring you back to Bethel", and Jacob said, "I'm coming back to Bethel." I want you to hear what happens in Genesis 33:18. *"After Jacob came from Padan Aram..."* Which is where Haran was. *"...he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel."*

Look back at the map and notice where Shechem is. Jacob had journeyed all the way up to Haran, and he was headed back toward Bethel. Just like God had told him he would bring him to Bethel, and how he had said he was going to Bethel. But you see just north of Bethel, a place called Shechem. Shechem is only twenty miles short of Bethel. He had gone all the way to Haran, but he had come back twenty miles short of where God had told him to come; where Jacob had told God he would come back to.

But he stops in Shechem. There is good business there; good opportunities for money, and he buys a plot of ground there. Jacob was learning that sin is subtle. God had said, "Come back to Bethel." Jacob had said, "I'm coming back to Bethel." All of a sudden, we see him stopping just twenty short miles from where God had told him to go and where he had told God he would go. I'm sure in Jacob's mind, at this point, the thought process is, "I'm close enough; I'm right near where I was when I made that commitment to God. It's not a big deal to be twenty miles short. I'm in the general vicinity. It's not like I've wondered way off to the east of this map or gone way out of the way to the north. I've come back within twenty miles. It's not that big a deal."

This is the type of thought process that pleases the Adversary most; the idea that God is pleased as long as we are in the general vicinity of where He has called us to be. "After all, it's only one small area of my life that I'm compromising in. It's not like I've gone way off the deep end. It's not like I've missed the boat altogether. It's just a couple of little things. They are not a big deal." This is how the Adversary works from cover to cover in Scripture, and how the Adversary works in each of our lives this morning. To convince us that 95% is good enough, that these few areas in each of our lives where we stop short are not a big deal when you think about it in the grand scheme of things.

Let's be honest with each other this morning. For those of us who are followers of Christ, who are involved in this faith family called The Church at Brook Hills, Satan's strategy has not been to get us way off the map, to where we fall off the deep end into the things of this world that have nothing to do with church anymore; don't believe in God, hate God, hate church. He's not going to tempt us with that. Instead, Satan's strategy is to get you to stop just this short. Because the reality is, if he can get you to stop this short at that point, then he can get you to stop a little shorter and a little shorter, and a little shorter. This is how Satan works. Little by little; sin is extremely subtle.

Don't miss the first thing Jacob does when he is being disobedient; he's camping out in Shechem instead of getting to where he told God he was going to go. What is the first thing he does end of Genesis 33? *"There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel."* In other words, "the Mighty God, the God of Israel." Here is Jacob, living in disobedience, stopping short of what he told God he would do and what God told him to do, and the first thing he does is set up an altar. Don't miss it: Religion is the biggest cover up for disobedience in our lives. Religion is the biggest cover up for stopping short.

People in the Old Testament, people in the New Testament, and people today have mastered religious activity regardless of religious intimacy. We are a people who can fool ourselves into believing everything is okay in our relationship with God because of our

religious activity. All the while, there are so many facets of our lives where we are stopping way short. The picture we have of God throughout Scripture, including this particular passage, is that God is not interested in your religion; He is interested in your obedience. The danger is that we can become content as followers of Jesus Christ, going almost all the way with our devotion to Him, and mask that last part with religious activity that makes things seem like they are all right.

Across this room are men who, no question, think, "It's only a couple of sites that I've looked at on the Internet." Across this room, there are men who have thought, "You know, it's not that big a deal that I don't lead my wife and my family spiritually. I mean, after all, I could be a lot worse. I'm doing a lot better than most guys in the world." There are women across this room that think it's all right to flirt with that man regardless of the effect it might have on her marriage; women across this room who justify treating a husband this way or that way because he's not meeting your needs like he should. Students across this room that think, "You know, it's not that big a deal that I just did this thing one time. Or, that I, in my dating relationship with girlfriend or my boyfriend, have not been completely pure. We haven't done what everybody else has done."

It is small things, and we think it is not a big deal. And it's not just things we do, it's things we don't do. "You know, it's not that big a deal that I'm not spending time in the study of the Word. It's not that big a deal that I'm not long in prayer. It's not that big a deal that I haven't shared the gospel with anyone in my entire Christianity. It's not that big a deal; I could be doing a lot worse things." Ladies and gentlemen, it is a big deal to a holy God whenever we stop just short of what He has called us, commanded us, to do.

So, the question I want to ask you this morning, very honestly, all across this room is: "Where are you stopping short? What area or areas of your life, your faith, your relationship with God are you stopping short?" This is really not even just for followers of Christ. If you are here this morning, and you are not a follower of Christ, and you've never put your faith in God, there's still a tendency in which the Adversary will certainly say to you that you don't have to take that final step. "You can be a good man a good woman, a good husband, a good wife. After all, you have gone off and done what all kinds of other people do. You're a good person. You don't need to take that final step." Don't miss the subtlety of sin.

It leads to a second lesson that Jacob would learn here. Lesson two: He learned that compromise is costly. First, he learned that sin is subtle, and second, he learned that compromise is costly. He camped out there in Shechem, just twenty miles short of Bethel. Listen to what happened. Genesis 34:1 says, *"Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, 'Get me this girl as my wife.'"*

Just in case you don't realize what just happened, Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, was just raped by the son of the ruler in Shechem. His own daughter was left alone among the pagan Canaanites and was defiled, violated. What happens after that is they enter into discussions with the men of Shechem. The men of Shechem decide that they would be willing to be circumcised in order to be able to do business dealings with all of Jacob's sons. So, now you've got people who are faking religion to get a business advantage. You get to Genesis 34:25, and it says this:

*Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the*

*unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks, and herds, and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything that was in the houses.*

What a horrible picture of Jacob's sons becoming murderers, killing every male in Shechem, and looting the entire land. Then later on, we find out they come back and Jacob's house is filled with foreign gods and idols. Get the picture: This is Jacob, the man of promise, the man through whom God has promised to bless His people Israel. His only daughter has just been raped; his sons have become murderers and could have started all out war in the land of Canaan. His house is full of idols. How does this happen? It happened because he stopped twenty miles short. No big deal, right?

Ladies and gentlemen, Jacob had no idea what it would cost, not only him, but the people around him, when he stopped twenty miles short. I want to submit to you this morning that you and I have no idea what it will cost, not only each of us, but the people around us, when we compromise at all in our relationship with Christ. We have no idea the depth of the cost of compromise.

This is where that other lie from the Adversary comes in and convinces us that our sin will not affect the people around us. That is wrong! Husbands do not think that looking at one site on the Internet will only affect you. There is no question it will affect your wife and your children. Husbands and wives in conflict with one another, you know that your conflict is not just limited to its effects on you. It is affecting precious children that God has entrusted to you. Men and women who are giving themselves to the things of this world, even in small bits, replacing worship of God with worship of the things of this world have no idea what it is costing.

You realize, members of this faith family, The Church at Brook Hills, that your compromise does not just affect you; it affects all the people in this room. This is a humbling thought. We're so individualistic, and we think our sin is isolated to us. I am convinced, based on the authority of God's Word, that one person's compromise, one person's compromise in this room, can have an affect on the entire Church at Brook Hills.

Here is why I say that: Fast forward with me over to Joshua 7. Don't miss this! The background here is the Israelites go into the Promised Land, and they take the city of Jericho. And once they take the city of Jericho, they were told by God to get rid of everything that is impure. "Everything that belongs to these people who worship false gods, get rid of it all. Don't keep the plunder for yourself. Make my holiness known in the land."

Then, Joshua 7 says, "*The Israelites acted unfaithfully in regards to the devoted things. Achan, son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them.*" One man took some of them, and the Lord's anger burned against Israel. Listen to what happens:

*Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai.*

*When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water.*

*Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O LORD, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"*

*The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction."*

Did you catch that? One man keeps things behind, and all of a sudden, thirty-six men die. All the people of Israel were wondering if God had left them. And God says that one man did this, and in response, they have taken some of the devoted things, they have stolen, and they have lied. Individual compromise in a relationship with Christ always affects the entire corporate body of Christ.

Joshua comes, and he says, "What are you going to do for your great name, God? We are getting destroyed!" Don't miss it: It wasn't just affecting the people of God. The nations around them were not seeing the holiness of God. And Joshua asks, "Don't you want to show your great name to them?" And God says, "Yes I do, so be holy; get rid of these things." Don't miss this: There is no question that when we compromise, and we fall short in our relationship with God, others are affected. There is not a husband in this room whose wife is not affected by his compromise, or he by hers. There's not a couple in this room whose children are not affected by compromise in their relationship with God. There is not a student in this room whose parent is not affected by compromise in his relationship with God. It is not just us that are affected.

It's not even just the people in this room, in this church, that we affect. It's the people who are outside of this picture. It's people in Birmingham who have turned from Christ and want nothing to do with Christ and His church, because they have seen a group of people who show that Christ makes no difference in their lives. When divorce statistics and pornography addiction is just the same in the church, so to speak, as it is outside the church, then a lost world looks and says, "What difference does Jesus Christ really make?"

Before you decide, men, it's okay for you not to lead your family spiritually, and before you decide it's a small thing to do this or that...if you're not going to stop doing it for the sake of the people around you who mean the most, at least stop doing it for the people who are on

the road that leads to hell and who need to be turned back to Christ. Compromise is costly! Jacob had no idea, and we have no idea, what is involved when we stop just short of what God is telling us to do.

Thankfully, though, this story does not end with the cost of compromise in Genesis 34. How many of you are thankful we worship a God who gives second chances? Anybody thankful for third chances? Fourth, fifth, sixth? Jacob learned the penalty of sin. He learned that compromise is costly, but he learned that God is gracious! And God comes to Jacob in Genesis 35, and He says to Jacob,

*"Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.*

God comes down to Jacob, and He says to Jacob, "It's time to clean house. Get rid of the foreign gods and get to the place where I told you I'd take you, where you have committed to go. Leave all this behind."

This picture of grace in Genesis 35 is so beautiful on so many different levels. Don't miss the preface of grace. You catch it in verse 3, at the very end, where it says, "...build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." Isn't this good news? Even when we stop short, even when we don't go all the way, we have a God who says, "I will not leave my people." He has been with me wherever I've gone. He's been with me. He's been right there even in the middle of my disobedience. My God has not abandoned me. That is grace!

And not just the presence of grace, but the purity of grace says, "We're going to leave all this stuff behind. It is time to come clean, get rid of all these foreign gods, purify yourself, and change your clothes. Come clean, and let's go to where I designed for you, and I desire for you." It's what He says to us as His people, "You don't have to live in your sin. You don't have to stay twenty miles short or two hundred miles short. I will take you where I want you, to where it's best for you. Come clean." Men and women across this room, who are dabbling in the subtlety of sin in whatever area of your life it may be, come clean! Men and women across this room who are falling short in the areas of our lives, whether it's prayer, or studying the Word, or sharing the gospel, come clean.

So, we know what we're supposed to do, and we've fallen short of that. Come clean, and be honest before God. The tendency is for us to think, "I'm in too deep. I can't come clean with what's going on in my life right now. I can't come completely clean." Pride is the biggest enemy of grace. Pride insists that you can fix it; you can solve it if you just have enough time. It's not true. The beauty of the gospel is you can't solve it. God says, "I'll purify you. I'll change it; I'll take you there. I'll solve it for you, but you have to come clean." This is the New Testament message of 1 John 1:9: "*If you confess your sins, he is faithful and a just to forgive you of all your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.*"

The purity of grace...don't miss it...is not just His presence and His purity. There is also the promise of His grace. Follow along with me in verse 9.

*After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So, he named him Israel.*

*And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and [underline this in your Bible] kings will come from your body."*

This is God's promise to Jacob. "You will increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body." What does that mean? See Jacob had a son whose name was Judah. In Genesis 49, it said in verses 8-10 that one would come from Judah whose rule would reign until the obedience of the nations is His. You see from the line of Judah would come King David. Kings would come from his body. King David would come from Judah, but the line doesn't end there. Look forward, and we see that from the line of David would come King Jesus, though Jacob probably had no clue of the depth of this promise. The picture we've got, from Genesis to Matthew 1, is the picture of a God who told Jacob on that day that through his line would come the king of the nations.

Now don't miss it; think about something with me. What if Jacob had stopped there in Shechem, where his daughter Dinah is raped and his sons become murderers? What if they did start all out war in the land of Canaan? What if Jacob's family was put into major jeopardy at that point? What if something had happened to Judah? Without Judah, you don't have the line of David; without the line of David, you don't have King Jesus. And without King Jesus, all of us are headed to an eternity separated from God's love. Obviously, that did not happen. God is sovereign to preserve our salvation. Don't miss this whole picture from Genesis all the way to the New Testament. I don't think Jacob had any clue what God would do in and through him if only he would get to Bethel.

I'm convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that you have no idea what God wants to do in and through your lives and your family if only you would get to Bethel. I'm convinced that we, as The Church at Brook Hills, have no idea what God would do in and through this faith family if we will only get to Bethel; if we would turn aside from the vicious cycle that plagues the church today. This cycle that says it is okay to be moderately committed to Christ. "I go to worship, and I look around me and there are a lot of people who are moderately committed to Christ." So we find safety there. We see someone else compromising, so we say that it's not a big deal then. "They worship; they compromise; he's a pastor; she's a small group leader; that is a person that I know, friends at church, and I know that they're compromising in that area. It's not that big a deal for me to compromise in that area." We have this vicious cycle where, instead of challenging each other and spurring each other on toward Christ, we actually implicitly encourage each other to coast through Christianity.

What happens when a church leaves that behind and says, "By the grace of God, not by our own works, not by our own merit, but by the grace of God, we are going to come clean and be honest with God about real sin in our lives, and we're going to rise up and take His grace and go where He wants to lead us?" Don't miss this: You look throughout church history, revival and spiritual awakening does not happen when people outside the church start getting right with God. It happens when people inside the church stop covering up for their sin with their religion, get honest with God, receive His grace, and go where He's led them

to go. God, may it be so in The Church at Brook Hills! We have no clue what God wants to do in and through us. If only we would refuse to stop at Shechem; if only we would go all the way.

I have a friend named Michael Guido. He is a man from south Georgia, kind of a modern day George Mueller, who has had a ministry completely based on prayer. Never publishing needs, just praying, and God provides everything they need. Michael tells the story of his salvation. He grew up in a home that was not Christian, and his dad was deliberately anti-Christian. His mom, though, had different ideas, and she decided she wanted to learn more about Christ. There was a church that met down the street, and she started slipping away and going down there and ended up coming to faith in Christ. Then she came back and led Michael and his sisters to a relationship with Christ.

The only problem was that when Michael's dad found out this was happening, his alcoholism turned into abuse, and he began to beat his mom as well as Michael and his sisters, threatening them if they continued to go and be a part of this Christian church. Michael said he can remember sitting late at night after his father had gone to sleep in the corner of one of their bedrooms, and his mom leading them in a Bible study. They would sit there and study the Word together and go back to their beds before dad woke up.

One night when they were studying there, they came across this picture of baptism in Scripture and decided that, since they had placed their faith in Christ, they needed to follow what the Scriptures say and be baptized. The only problem was as soon as they made a public statement of their faith in Christ through baptism, who knew what their dad was going to do at that point. They said, "We are willing to risk that", so they set a particular Sunday night to be baptized.

On that afternoon, their father had been drinking and carried out his normal abuse on his mom and him and his sisters. After he finished, he fell asleep there in the den, and Michael described how he and his sisters and his mom slipped out of the house quietly to get in the car, fresh off of this abuse, to go down and be baptized. He said they got in the car, and he looked at his mom, who was visibly hurting by what she had just been through. He looked at her and said, "Mom, we are studying and growing in Christ; we don't have to go down and do this tonight. Maybe this is not best." And I'll never forget how Michael Guido related his mom's response, when she looked back at him and said these words: His mom looked back and said, on that day, "Son, we have to realize something, and you need to realize something. When you follow Jesus, you either go all the way or not at all." So, they went down and got baptized that day, and their father definitely didn't like that. But Michael tells about how years later, because of their commitment to Christ, his father ended up bowing on his knees and giving his heart to Christ. Praise God for a mom who said that, when you follow Jesus, you either go all the way or not at all.

And in an even greater way, I can't help but think that, when Jesus stood on trial before false accusers, that He was tempted to stop short. "Here are the people you came to save," the Adversary says, "and they are falsely accusing you. You have loved them; you've cared for them; you've healed their diseases. Isn't that enough?" A crown of thorns being thrust into His head, being beaten, and lash after lash after lash, He had no thoughts that He had come to heal them and love them and look at what they were doing, that He had done enough. As He walked a road to a cross, was hoisted up on it, and nails thrust into His arms and legs, there was a temptation to say, "I don't have to go through all of this." But praise God that, on that day, our Savior looked at the Adversary and said, "Satan, when you follow my Father, you either go all the way or not at all." Praise God that three days later, He arose from the grave!

Ladies and gentlemen, we are fooling ourselves if we think we are a people who have committed our lives to Christ, yet we are stopping short at Shechem in any facet of our lives. We have a Savior who has shown us what it means to follow the Father all the way or not at all. We can rise up from Shechem and go to where He has led us. So, I ask you, what areas of your faith, of your relationship with God, are you compromising? Where have you stopped short? Are you ready to rise today at the end of 2007 and say, "I want to go all the way"?

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