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Hebrews 11

“Faith Lessons” Part 2

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This is the second study in the Hebrews 11 series. Last week Pastor Gary referred to the 17 men and women, along with unnamed others, who are listed as great examples of those who exercised faith through times of trials and testing, difficulties and decision.

We learned that there is a difference between saving faith, the gift of faith, and living by faith. It is living by faith that is the focus of this study series. It’s trusting God through our times our own times of trials and testing, difficulties and decisions.

It’s important to be reminded that faith is defined as “action based on trust and confidence in the promises and faithfulness of God.” Faith is not simply an emotional feeling or a mental conviction; it’s action. It is living our lives with trust and confidence in the promises and faithfulness of God.

The first study centered on Abel, Enoch and Noah. Today’s study looks at Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Abraham is considered the patriarch of Judaism – thus Christianity, too – because there was no Jewish race and no nation of Israel, until God appeared to Abraham (a pagan man living in a pagan land – Iraq¹) and called him to leave his country and go to the land God would show him. Not only did God call Abraham, he also made a promise to Abraham² in [Genesis 12:2-3](#): *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through*

¹ Formerly known as Chaldea, Babylon, and Mesopotamia.

² Abraham was a 75-year-old man who had no children when God made this promise to him!

you.” And, true to his word, God created the Jewish race and formed the nation of Israel through this man’s seed.

Abraham’s promised son, Isaac, and his son, Jacob, would follow God too. In fact, there are many references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Bible.

Isaac and Jacob

1. **Hebrews 11:20–21** – *“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.”*
 - a. One thing these two men have in common is that they both blessed the next generation regarding their future.
 - b. In **Genesis 27**, Isaac blesses his sons.
 - c. In **Genesis 48**, Jacob blesses his grandsons.
 - i. Jacob blessed his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, before his sons because his sons were responsible for the scheme to trick their father into believing Joseph was dead when, in fact, they had sold him into slavery!
2. The details of what they said are not as important to our study as the faith that they demonstrated when they pronounced their blessing.
 - a. Blessing your children and grandchildren is a demonstration of faith because you believing, by faith exercising faith, in the love and goodness of God and in his providential care of them concerning their future.
 - b. The blessing was an act that indicated their trust in God as much as it demonstrated their love for their children.
 - c. The paternal blessing was the most valuable heritage that parents could bequeath to their children.
 - i. Today, a blessing upon a boy is, *“May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.”* (**Genesis 48:20**)
 - ii. Today, a blessing upon a girl is, *“May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.”*
 - iii. In addition to these specific blessings, a special blessing is generally included.
3. A Godly heritage was passed to their children and they blessed them because they believed God; that he was a good, faithful, and loving God who has a future for his children.

Abraham

4. Abraham was a man of great faith, and there are three great tests of faith in his life that we're going to look at in this study.
5. In [Hebrews 11:8](#), we learn that while he was living in Ur, ³ when God appeared to him and said, *"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* ([Genesis 12:1](#))
 - a. He wasn't given directions about where to go, he just started walking, trusting God and exercising faith; figuring that if he was off course, God would appear to him again.
 - b. He would travel some 1,400 miles until he arrived at the land God had promised.
 - c. [Hebrews 11:9](#) indicates that he would live in tents, because *"he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God."*
 - d. He was living in the Promised Land, but he always had an eye on heaven; he lived on earth *"like a stranger in a foreign country,"* ([Hebrews 11:9](#)) because this was not his home.
6. Abraham was 75 years old and childless when God spoke to him about descendants. ([Hebrews 11:12](#))
 - a. When Abraham was 85 years old, he and his wife try to help God along in the plan.
 - i. He agreed to his wife, Sara's, suggestion that he sleep with her maidservant, Hagar, with the result being a son named Ishmael, who is the father of the Arab people and the favored son of Islam.
 - ii. This wasn't God's will, because God's will was that, in time, Isaac would be born to Abraham and Sara, even though they would be 100 and 90, respectively.
 - iii. Abraham was *"enabled to become a father"* ([Hebrews 11:11](#)) because he believed God, but he had to wait 25 years for the promise to be fulfilled.
 - iv. His faith and his trust in the promises and faithfulness of God led him to believe God against all odds.
 - b. God is bigger than the odds, and sometimes we have to wait until all human ability has been exhausted so that we will know the miracles of God!

³ Ur was a city near the mouth of the Euphrates in ancient Babylon, which was known for its pagan worship of the moon god, Sin.

7. In [Hebrews 11:17-19](#), we read about the time when God called Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.
- a. God would challenge the very promise God gave Abraham about having a son when he asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.
 - i. Can you imagine waiting 25 years for something and then have God say to you, “I want you to give it up”?
 - ii. It’s a remarkable thing to see how much faith Abraham had and how much he believed God, even to the point of considering that God, if he allowed Isaac to die, could raise him from the dead.
 - iii. [Genesis 22:1-5](#) – *“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’ ”*
 - iv. Notice that Abraham said to Isaac, “we will worship⁴ and we will come back.”
 1. He’s already exercising faith because he said, “**we** will come back.” (Emphasis added)
 - v. This is one of those moments when Abraham must have been thinking, “I don’t know how God is going to pull this off, but I know he will, because he wouldn’t promise me a son and descendants through him if he was really going to kill him!” ([Genesis 22:6-14](#))
 - vi. For Abraham, it’s as though he was thinking, “What I do not understand now, God will make clear to me later, because he always works things out for my good and his glory!”

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Hebrews 11:8-21](#) to provide an overview for this study.

⁴ This is the first time the word, worship is used in the Bible.

3. Pastor Gary mentioned Zig Zigler's⁵ comments about the blessing Jewish fathers give their children, and how Zig believed that translated into children who grew up more healthy and whole.
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences regarding a parent or grandparent's blessing.
 - b. If no one has had this experience, spend time talking about these discussion starters.
 - i. Jews make up about 2% of the total U.S. population, but they only make up about 0.3% of the total prison population.⁶
 - ii. Michigan had 82,000 Baptists and 83,000 Jews in their state population. However, there were 22 times as many Baptists as Jews, and 18 times as many Methodists as Jews in their prison population.⁷
4. Spend time talking about experiences with a parental blessing over a child.
 - a. If you've not had this experience as a parent, are you now more likely to give a blessing to your child(ren)?
 - b. If you're a parent, and you have not bestowed a blessing on your child(ren), do you plan to give a formal blessing like this?
5. Have you, like Abraham, been called of God to pack up your things, your life and your family and move to another part of your state, the U.S. or the world?
 - a. What was your reaction to God's call?
 - b. Did you have a sense of exactly where to go or were you somewhat sure of the general location?
 - c. What was the reaction of the members of your immediate and extended family?
 - d. Abraham traveled 1,400 miles to the Promised Land. How far and how has your journey been?
 - e. Have you gone down any "rabbit trails" along the way?
 - f. How has God been faithful to his promise to provide for you as you have stepped out in faith to follow his leading?
 - g. Have you, like most military families, resigned yourself to the idea that there is no permanence in this life?
 - h. Allow time for people to share the stories of missionaries they know and how they handled God's call to "Go!"
6. Abraham lived in tents because he was looking forward to his heavenly home.
 - a. How have you intentionally lived your life to demonstrate that you, like Abraham, recognize that this world is not your real home?

⁵ <http://www.zigziglarstory.com/>

⁶ <http://www.jewishpenpals.org/faq.html> (8,000 prisoners out of a prison population of 2.3 million)

⁷ <http://www.skepticfiles.org/american/prison.htm>

- b. Do you think it's okay to have a home, possessions, etc.?
 - c. Is it God's desire that we enjoy the good things he gives?
 - d. How have you struck a balance between enjoying God's blessings with a future home in heaven?
 - e. Do you think some people believe the answer is being a minimalist regarding possessions, etc.?
 - f. What would the evidence be if others described your life and your lifestyle?
 - i. Would they say you're living for today?
 - ii. Would they say there's something different about you when they look at their life or the lives of most people in your community?
 - g. Do you look forward to your heavenly home, or do you think that you are prone to live for the here and now? ([Hebrews 11:9](#))
 - i. Pastor Gary has said, "This life is as good as it gets for the unbeliever, but for Christians, this life is as bad as it gets!"
7. Have there been times in your life when you've tried to help God along? (See #6 above)
8. Do you, like Abraham, have faith and trust in God to believe that he ultimately does all things for my good and his glory?
 - a. Is it possible to find a place of rest in the Lord, even when the circumstances and situations of life are less than ideal?
9. Close your time with prayer and allow the Holy Spirit: to help each person to intentionally live a life that is balanced and not a life that shows that they are too attached to the things, people and places of this world; to minister to each person to help them determine by God's grace, to live a life of faith, like these believers in the Hall of Faith.