

## INTRODUCTION

Two hunters got lost in the woods. One of them said, "I've always heard that if you're lost, you're supposed to shoot three times in the air and help will come." So they shot three times and waited. Nobody came. They shot three times again. No response. Finally one said, "I sure hope this works this time because we're down to our last three arrows."

Daniel Boone, the famous frontier explorer, said he was never lost but he was often bewildered for a week or two.

Abraham did a lot of traveling but he was never lost. We're visiting God's Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11. Abel taught us about worshiping by faith. Enoch showed us what it is to walk by faith. Noah demonstrated the importance of working by faith. Today we come to Abraham and we're going to learn about waiting by faith.

Abraham is one of the most important men in the history of religion. Abraham is the only man in history revered as the father of three great faiths: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. His name originally was Abram, which meant "high priest." But God later changed it to Abraham, which means "father of many." To simplify things, I'll be using the name Abraham to describe all of the events of his life as the writer of Hebrews does.

For many years, if you wanted to drive from one state to another, you had to rely on a roadmap. We still have a thick road atlas in the back of our car, even though I haven't opened it in many years. A couple of decades ago something better came along. It's called GPS. That stands for Global Positioning System. Our government has placed 27 solar-powered satellites in constant orbit around the earth. Only 24 are used, three are there as replacements if one or more satellite breaks down. If you have a GPS receiver, this network of satellites uses a process called trilateration to compute exactly where you are anywhere on the face of the planet within a few meters. So now, most of us have a GPS on our smartphones or in our automobiles. Roadmaps have become obsolete.

When Abraham left his home, he didn't have a road map, but he did have a GPS faith. He didn't get data from a satellite in space; he got his directions from the One who made the stars. Abraham's GPS was not Global Positioning System it was God's Promise Secured. Abraham received a promise from God, and He believed God, and that was enough to get him moving. The next time you use your GPS, I want you think about God's GPS: God's Promise Secured. It will be functioning long after the stars have all gone dark!

In this message I'll introduce the four faith lessons and then we'll read that corresponding scripture, so keep your Bible's open.

### **1. Abraham obeyed God's call to leave his home.**

Abraham was a man living in what is now modern-day Iraq. He was a pagan and the Jewish tradition says his father sold idols. One day, God spoke to him and told him to pack up and

leave. So he took off. He wasn't a nomad, a refugee, or a fugitive. He was a pilgrim heading toward a home he'd never seen before. Our scripture says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8 CSB)

He didn't know where he was going, but he was never lost. Some wealthy hunters hired a local guide in Colorado to lead them into the mountains. After several days of walking, it became obvious they were lost. One of the hunters became angry with the guide and said, "I thought you said you were the best guide in Colorado." The guide said, "I am. But I'm pretty sure we're in Wyoming now!"

Abraham wasn't lost. Abraham used his GPS and headed northwest until he got to a place called Haran in modern-day Turkey. Then God directed Abraham South until he arrived in Canaan—the place that would one day become the nation of Israel.

When you put the chronology together from Genesis 12, Abraham was 75 when he first enrolled in God's School of faith. The most exciting years of his life were yet to come. How many of you are under 75? Cheer up; the most exciting times of your life may still be in your future!

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE: Am I willing to step out in faith when I don't know the final destination?**

What would you have done? I would have said, "Go where? Where's the roadmap? I want to know where I'm going, and what's going to be there when I get there." I would really struggle with this. I confess that I used to be a planning freak. You can ask my family. I used to drive them a little crazy when I would plan a vacation. I would print out a day-by-day and hour-by-hour itinerary of what we were going to do.

But sometimes God tells us to move and doesn't give us the destination. Many times God calls us to leave our comfort zone and step out in faith. Abraham teaches us that real faith starts moving before you know the destination. God sent Abraham to Haran, even though that wasn't the final destination.

God often reveals His will to us in stages. A little boy who lived on a farm was afraid of the dark. One night his father said, "Son, go to the barn and check on the cows." The boy said, "But daddy, it's dark, and I can't see the barn." His father stood on the porch and asked, "Can you see the well?" "Yes, Daddy." "Then go to the well." "But I still can't see the barn." "That's okay son, can you see the apple tree?" "Yes sir." "Then walk to the apple tree." The little boy walked to the apple tree. The father shouted, "Now, can you see the barn?" The boy smiled and said, "Yes, father, now I see the barn." And the dad said, "Good. Then go check on the cows, my son."

The Psalmist explains it this way, "The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him." (Psalm 37:23 NIV) Just start walking and God will guide you each step of the way. There is an important principle I call "spiritual momentum." It's easier for God to direct a person if he

or she is already in motion serving Him. A boat sitting dead still in the water can't be turned by the rudder. That vessel is "dead in the water." It has to have forward motion in order for the rudder to be effective. In the same way, if you are seeking God's direction, don't sit still—if you do, you're "dead in the water." If you are active in serving God anywhere you can, it's easier for Him to direct you into different paths of service.

## **2. Abraham claimed a property promised to his descendants.**

When Abraham arrived in Canaan he put up a tent and said, "This land is mine. God gave this land to me; this brave and ancient land to me." That was a profession of faith, because he didn't own an inch of land and he didn't have any descendants. The Bible says, "By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise." (Hebrews 11:9 CSB) Abraham and his family camped out in tents because they were foreigners. If he had started to build a permanent house of stone, the Canaanites would have evicted him in the blink of an eye.

Can't you imagine Abraham sitting around the fire at night as he said to Sarah and his nephew Lot, "One day, all of this land is going to be ours. Our descendants will build houses and vineyards here. They will build cities and roads. They will plant trees and crops and the land will be flowing with milk and honey." And the servants would scratch their heads and say to each other, "This is nothing but a desert. We're living in tents in hostile territory and Big Daddy (that's what Abraham means) doesn't have any children. Does anybody care to take a bet on any of that happening?" But Abraham believed God's Promise.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE: Am I willing to claim something as real when I don't see any visible evidence?**

Biblical faith is the ability to see something when there is no evidence to indicate it's there. You believe it just because God says it is so. Real faith doesn't demand proof. Years ago a man who claimed to be an atheist said to me, "You Christians are fools. You just accept by faith that there is a God." I said, "You're absolutely right. I believe by faith that God exists." He said, "So prove to me that God exists." I said, "I can't. But you also believe by faith that there is no God. Prove to me that God DOESN'T exist." He said, "I can't prove there is no God." I said, "We're both believers. I believe God does exist, and you believe that God doesn't exist." Science can neither prove nor disprove there is a God. Going into a laboratory to try to find God would be like tearing a piano apart to try to find music.

I love the miracle of Jesus we read about in Luke 7. A Roman Centurion sent word asking Jesus to come to his house to heal a valuable servant who was sick. Jesus started there, but before he could get there the Centurion sent a messenger that said, "My master said you don't need to come to his house. He is not worthy for you to enter under his roof. He is a commander and understands authority, as do you. He requests that you simply say the word and he believes that his servant will be healed." Wow. The Centurion didn't need to see Jesus, or even hear Him speak the words, He just believed with no visible proof that Jesus was able to heal his servant.

Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "I have not found so great a faith, even in Israel." Faith doesn't rest on evidence. It rests on the solid promise of God.

### **3. Abraham looked ahead to a Heavenly home.**

Abraham realized that the land of Canaan wasn't the final Promised Land. He knew it was only dirt and water. He looked far, far into the future and saw his heavenly home.

The Bible says, "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:0 CSB) When you live in a tent city, you don't have any foundations. You have some tent pegs, and some rugs piled on the desert sand. In his travels, Abraham had seen some cities. These cities were made of buildings of stone. Someone had designed those cities and built those cities.

Any time you see a building you can surmise there was an architect and a builder. Over the past ten years our church built the Lighthouse and the CrossWalk Conference Center. These buildings didn't just appear, or grow out of the ground. There was an architect that designed them, Steve Fitzpatrick. And Denson Construction Company built it. These buildings are the testimonies of the existence of Fitzpatrick Architects and Denson Construction. When you look at the intricate design and the massive display of the heavens and the earth, they are a testimony that there is a Divine Architect and Builder. And Abraham had the faith and vision to see the heavenly city whose architect and builder is God. He looked at life through the prism of his final, final destination: Heaven. We'll talk more about the better country next week.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE: Am I willing to see things that happen now from the perspective of Heaven?**

If you're getting your news feed from any source except the Word of God, it is ALL fake news. We should be interpreting everything that is happening from the perspective of heaven. The Bible says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-6 CSB)

You don't have to wait until you get to heaven to adopt heaven's perspective. Everything looks different from a distance. Our planet is full of valleys and mountains, but from the perspective of space, it looks as smooth as a blue billiard ball. In God's mind we are already citizens of heaven, so we should look at everything that happens here through the prism of heaven. As we've been saying, don't let CNN or Fox News give you your worldview. Get your worldview from the Word of God, it contains the Good News, not the fake news.

There weren't many Sunday nights that our family missed church, but there were a few, especially after we got a color television and could watch Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color. I can remember seeing Walt Disney stand in front of a map of Florida and talk about plans for the Magic Kingdom near a small town named Orlando. He talked about a series of parks that would fill 43 square miles, twice the size of Manhattan.

Walt Disney died five years before Disney World had its grand opening in 1971. At the dedication someone turned to Mrs. Disney and said, "Isn't it a shame that Walt didn't live to see this?" She replied, "Oh, but he DID see it—that's why it's here." Abraham had eyes of faith to see the real Promised Land. Do you?

#### **4. Abraham waited for God to fulfill His promise.**

When Abraham was 75, he didn't have any children. But God said, "You're going to be the father of a great nation and all the nations will be blessed by you. I can imagine Abraham and Sarah started painting the nursery and picking out names for their children. Ten years passed. No kids. Fifteen years. No kids. That must have been tough.

This passage even refers to Sarah's faith. The Bible says, "By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful. Therefore, from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore." (Hebrews 11:11-12 CSB)

Let's face it. God must have an interesting sense of humor. He chose a couple of super seniors to begin his chosen nation. We know God laughs because Psalms 2 says that he who sits enthroned in the heavens laughs. If we had been making that plan we would have chosen a couple of young twenty-something's. But there's nothing supernatural about twenty-something's having babies. Just look at our church nursery!

In Genesis 17, more than twenty years after the first promise of a family, God once again repeated His promise that Sarah would have a son. I love the way Abraham responded. The Bible says, "Abraham fell facedown. Then he laughed and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can Sarah, a ninety-year-old woman, give birth?'" (Genesis 17:17 CSB) Do you ever talk to yourself? It's okay unless you start talking back to yourself. Abraham didn't ask the Lord those questions, he asked Himself. Can't you hear him asking, "Let me see, how many 100-year-old guys do I know who've become daddies for the first time? That would be zero. How many 99-year-old women have I known who had their first babies? Again that would be zero. So God must be in charge of this because it is humanly impossible!" And God said, "Now you get it, Abe!"

#### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE: Can I patiently trust God when I haven't received what He has promised?**

Our culture is all about instant gratification. I want it and I want it NOW! We eat fast food; we drive fast cars and we get upset if the computer takes more than 30 seconds to reboot. We want to do everything quicker these days. There's even a church in Pensacola, Florida that advertises itself as "fast-church." They offer a 22-minute worship service. They have one hymn, one prayer, one scripture reading—but they still make time to take an offering. And then the pastor

preaches an 8-minute sermon. I can see some of you thinking, "I like that idea." It will never happen here.

A hundred and fifty years ago if you missed the stagecoach you'd say, "No problem. There will be another stagecoach in a couple of days." A hundred years ago if you missed the train you'd say, "No problem, there will be another train tomorrow." Today, if we miss our flight, we're angry if we can't get re-booked in a matter of minutes.

The problem is that we are in such a hurry, and God isn't. With God, timing is more important than time. And His timing is always impeccable. True faith enables you to wait...and wait...and wait some more without giving up on God. So if God hasn't delivered on a promise yet, don't even think about giving up on God until you're at least 100 years old!

## **CONCLUSION**

This study isn't to just learn about great Bible characters. We are studying this chapter so we can learn how to practice real faith. There is a difference between belief and faith. You can believe things about God without fully trusting Him.

The first man to walk on a tightrope across Niagara Falls was Charles Blondin in 1860. A crowd of 25,000 cheering fans lined both shores to witness his amazing feat. In the days that followed, he traversed the falls on stilts, and even sitting in a chair. But one of his greatest feats was pushing a wheelbarrow across the tightrope filled with 300 pounds of weights.

Once he crossed he approached the spectators and asked, "How many of you believe I can push a man or woman in a wheelbarrow across the tightrope." Every hand went up. Then Blondin said, "Okay, who will volunteer?" They all refused. They believed he could do it, but none of them were willing to trust him by getting in the wheelbarrow. The next day, his manager, Harry Colcord, trusted Blondin enough to let him carry him across while riding on his back. He's the only one who truly placed his trust in Blondin.

Faith is not believing that God CAN do something. Faith is believing that God WILL do something. So, go ahead and get in the wheelbarrow, and trust Him. But I've got good news: Jesus has carried millions of people safely across the great divide, and He has never lost one yet. So, go ahead, get in the wheelbarrow! You can trust Him!

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*Hebrews 11:8 CSB*

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