

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth message in God's Faith Hall of Fame series. There are many Halls of Fame in the world. Besides being the home of a great college football program, Tuscaloosa, Alabama is the home of the Insurance Hall of Fame—it really exists—but you have to take out a liability policy before you enter. In Greers Ferry, Arkansas, there is a Duct tape Art Hall of Fame. If you visit just don't get stuck in a long line.

In my opinion, the greatest Hall of Fame is God's Faith Hall of Fame found in Hebrews 11. We're already talked about Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. Then we spent a lesson talking about Heaven, the better country that they were seeking. Now we come to the next four inductees. These are all members of Abraham's family, so I'm calling this message "Faith to Forge Strong Families."

Hebrews 11:17-22 (NIV). "BY FAITH Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. 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. BY FAITH Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."

This passage covers five generations of faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the two sons of Joseph. That's an amazing faith heritage. What kind of family faith heritage do you have? My grandmother on my dad's side was the daughter of a preacher, and she said she had been praying all her life for God to call another preacher in her family. She used to tell me I was the answer to her prayer. If you have parents and grandparents who love the Lord, you should give thanks to God.

Even if you don't have a great spiritual background, you can start now to build a spiritual heritage in your children and grandchildren. In this message I'll just be telling the stories of these men and then we'll extract a practical faith lesson from each of them.

1. ABRAHAM: TRUSTING GOD THROUGH TESTING.

The last time we saw Abraham, he was a hundred years old waiting for Sarah to give birth. They had a patient faith, and as He promised, God gave them a son. They named him Laughter—Isaac—because Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears about this will laugh too. Who would have thought an old woman would nurse her firstborn son?"

Several years passed, and most scholars believe Isaac was about eighteen years old when God decided to test Abraham. "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him...Take your

son," he said, "your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Genesis 22:2 CSB) I used to wonder how Abraham could even consider that, but as we read in Hebrews, Abraham had so much faith that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead!

As they walked up the slopes of Mt. Moriah, Isaac said, "Dad, we have the wood, and we have a torch, and we have a knife, but where is the lamb?" And with a burdened heart Abraham said, "Son, God will provide a lamb."

And moments before Abraham was going to plunge the knife into his son, an angel appeared and stopped him. God said, "Now, I know that you fear me. Don't harm your son." Abraham passed the test. The Bible says nearby a ram was caught by its horns in a thicket, and Abraham used that ram as a substitute for his son. His son lived, but the ram died.

Mt. Moriah and Golgotha are on the same slope. Two thousand years later, Jesus climbed the same hill. We deserved to die, but Jesus became our substitute, caught in a thicket of a crown of thorns. And as our substitute, Jesus died so we can live.

FAITH LESSON: God makes you stronger though testing.

We spend our whole lives trying to pass tests. There are spelling tests and math tests in elementary school. If you want to be able to drive, you take a driving test. If you want to go to medical school, there's the MCAT, and if you want to go to Law School there's the LSAT. We never stop taking tests—eye tests, hearing tests—I even heard about a guy in Arkansas was studying to take a urine test!

So we shouldn't be surprised that God tests us. He never tempts us to bring out our worst, He tests us to reveal the quality of our faith. Peter writes that God's testing is to PURIFY our faith, like fire purifies gold. He writes, "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold." (1 Peter 1:7 NLT)

Are you facing a hot furnace of affliction right now? When you find yourself in the fire of affliction, remember God is testing you. Don't worry. You won't be consumed by the fire. God may not ignite the fire of affliction, but He controls the thermostat!

You may wonder when He's going to turn down the heat. A silversmith looks into the crucible and watches as the purified silver floats to the top. The way he knows the silver is purified is when he can see a perfect reflection of his face in the silver. As the refiner, God is looking at you, and when He sees the reflection of the character of Jesus in your life, that's when you pass the test and your faith becomes more valuable.

2. ISAAC: TRUSTING GOD THROUGH DECEPTION.

Of the big three, we know less about Isaac than we do about Abraham and Jacob. The word to best describe Isaac would be "submissive." He submitted to his dad to be tied up as a sacrifice. Isaac didn't use Match.com to get a bride. Abraham's servant went bride shopping and brought Rebekah to him. He had never seen her before, but submitted to his choice to marry her.

Rebekah was barren for many years, but God answered their prayers in a double way; she was expecting twins. And these twins seemed to be battling against each other before they were born. She said, "Lord, what's going on?"

God told her, "You're not just carrying two sons, there are two nations in your womb, and one nation will be stronger than the other, and the older shall be the servant of the younger."

The big day came, and she gave birth to twins. The firstborn was covered with red hair, so they named him Esau, which means "Hairy." The second son came out hanging on to the heel of his older brother, so they named him Jacob, which means "grabber."

Esau grew up his daddy's favorite, because he was an outdoorsman who loved to hunt. Jacob was a momma's boy. As the younger son, Jacob didn't have access to the fortune of his father; that went to the firstborn, Esau. So, Jacob had cooked some Texas chili one day and Esau was starving. He said, "Give me some of that chili." Jacob, the grabber said, "I'll make a deal, I'll give you all the chili you can eat if you give me the birthright." Esau probably thought, "The birthright isn't worth anything without the blessing, so no big loss." He ate up the chili, and Jacob kept scheming.

When Isaac was old and blind, he knew he was about to die. He called Esau to him and said, "Son, I'm about to die, and I'm going to give you the blessing. But first go out and kill me a big old buck. I want my last meal to be venison backstrap."

So Esau got his hunting bow and headed out. But Rebekah had overheard the conversation and she was sneaky. She cooked up some deer meat and had Jacob put on some of his brother's clothes that smelled like the deer lease. Since Esau was a hairy guy, she got some goatskins and glued them to Jacob's arms and hands.

So Jacob entered his father's bedroom and said, "I'm back, dad. Here's your food." Isaac said, "That was quick!" Jacob lied and said, "Uh, God has blessed you by giving me a deer so quickly." Isaac suspected something was up so he said, "Come closer let me feel you."

And we read: "So Jacob came closer to his father Isaac. When he touched him, he said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. Again he asked, 'Are you really my son Esau?' And he replied, 'I am.'" (Genesis 27:22-24 NIV)

Isaac still wasn't convinced so he said, "Come close and let me kiss you." When Jacob approached, Isaac smelled Esau's gamy hunting aroma on his clothes, so he proceeded to give Jacob the formal blessing of the firstborn.

So Jacob and his mother tricked Isaac. They deceived him and made Esau the victim of their cruel scam. A few minutes later, Esau returned from his hunt, he said, "Dad, I'm back with your deer meat, and I'm ready to receive the blessing!" Isaac was confused. He said, "Who are you?" He said, "I am Esau!" Isaac said, "Well, who was THAT?" Esau knew it was the grabber, once again taking something that belonged to him. Esau vowed that after his father died he was going to kill Jacob, so Jacob packed up and became a man on the run.

FAITH LESSON: God is greater than the schemes of others.

There's no way to escape the fact that Jacob and his mother deceived Isaac. Esau later became the leader of the people called the Edomites, who warred against the Israelites. But God is so great He can use a sneaky grabber to create a great nation.

There's a good chance you are going to be lied to and cheated in this life. The world is full of scam artists. People will take advantage of you, but God can overcome the scams and schemes of other people.

We were close friends with a family in one of our previous churches. This family had once lived very comfortably because they were co-owners of a thriving business. I never got the whole story, but somehow their partner cheated them out of their part and they were left with a lot of debt and very little capital. They had been deceived into trusting some people they thought were friends. These two were a couple of the finest Christians I've ever known, and I never heard them speak one ugly word about their former partners. Even while the family who cheated them lived a rich lifestyle, this couple that had been wronged adjusted their lifestyle to live within their means and paid off the debt. In the midst of adversity they displayed an enthusiastic sense of joy and peace.

I remember this sweet lady saying to me over and over again, "God knows what's best. If we still had a lot of money, we might not be serving Him the way we are now."

You can survive adversity without bitterness and revenge. Maybe you've been cheated or lied to. It might have been a family member, a friend, or a business partner who deceived you. Don't let bitterness and anger ruin you. Don't take the attitude of the bumper sticker that said, "I don't get mad; I get even." Remember that bitterness is an acid that destroys its container. Entrust your situation to God and watch what He does.

3. JACOB: TRUSTING GOD THROUGH FAILURE.

We left Jacob running from Esau, who wanted to kill him. Let's fast forward through several decades. The cheater himself gets cheated. He finds a lovely bride, Rachel, and agrees to work for her dad for seven years for her. On the wedding day, he pulls back the veil expecting to see the lovely face of Rachel, and it's her older sister, plain Leah. Laban, the father explains, "Oh, I forgot to mention it is our custom that the older sister must be married first, so she's all yours." Jacob said, "Well, what about Rachel?" Laban said, "Sure you can have her too—for seven more years of working for me." Gotcha.

Jacob grows older and has lots of kids but his favorite is Joseph, so he gives him a technicolored coat. You know that story. Joseph goes from a pit to a prison then to the palace in Egypt. He's the Prime Minister of the greatest civilization on earth at the time. He moves his father Jacob and all of his family to join him in Egypt. They are given their own territory, the Land of Goshen.

As old man Jacob, whose name was now Israel, was dying, he wanted to give a blessing to Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and his little brother, Ephraim. The Bible says, "Then Joseph took them both—with his right hand Ephraim toward Israel's left, and with his left hand Manasseh toward Israel's right—and brought them to Israel. But Israel stretched out his right hand and put it on the head of Ephraim, the younger, and crossing his hands, put his left on Manasseh's head, although Manasseh was the firstborn." (Genesis 48:13-14 CSB)

The right hand was the hand of blessing, so Joseph led Manasseh, the oldest boy toward that hand, and he positioned Ephraim beside his dad's left hand. But old Jacob did the switcheroo. Again. Joseph said, "Dad, you're confused, Manasseh is the older boy, so place your right hand on him." Jacob said, "I know what I'm doing, son. Once again the younger will be greater than the older. And in the years to come the people will say to their sons, "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."

And by the way, last Friday night when our Jewish friends gathered on Friday evening for their Shabbat meal, the father held forth his hand and said, "May God bless you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Jewish fathers repeat that blessing every Friday night.

FAITH LESSON: God can use you in spite of your mistakes.

Jacob was a grabber for most of his life. But one evening, Jacob grabbed something he couldn't handle. He wrestled with an angel of God all night. Before he let go, he asked the angel to bless him. The angel touched him on the hip and Jacob would limp the rest of his life. But God gave him a new name. He said, "No longer will you be called "grabber." You will be called "Israel" which means, "one who struggles with God." God was able to change the grabber into the father of a great nation.

It wasn't so much how Jacob started, but how he finished the race. Maybe you've left a trail of mistakes behind you as well. But God can change your life without changing your name. There's still time to grab hold of His grace and let him turn you from a cheater to someone who is a blessing to others.

You won't hear this on the fake news, but there is revival happening in the Texas State Prison system. These are faith-based units that we and others have sponsored are working. Thousands of inmates are coming to Christ and being disciple—and this isn't jailhouse religion. Some of these inmates are in for life and see this as their mission field. If God can use these brave believers behind bars, He can use any of us.

4. JOSEPH: TRUSTING GOD THROUGH DEATH.

The story of Joseph is long and interesting. It takes up the last fourteen chapters of Genesis. But like these other heroes of faith, their story is long and involved, but the writer of Hebrews selects only one small detail to account for their faith. And Joseph is recognized in the Faith Hall of Fame for leaving some strange instructions for his burial.

The Bible says, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your aid and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So Joseph made the sons of Israel take an oath: "When God comes to your aid, you are to carry my bones up from here." (Genesis 50:24-25 CSB)

Joseph knew he was going to die, but he didn't want his bones left in Egypt. He had heard about God's promise to his great-grandfather, Abraham. Even though Joseph and his family were treated like royal guests at this time, Joseph knew harder times would come in the centuries ahead that would lead to the Hebrews becoming slaves. But he also saw that there would an exodus leading to an eventual entrance into the Promised Land.

So after he died, they preserved his body. When his flesh decayed, they kept his bones in a bone box. That bone box became a symbol of hope for the Hebrew people. When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, someone was carrying Joseph's bone box. Every time they moved I can hear Moses yelling, "Hey, don't forget the bone box!"

And five hundred years later when Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, we read this small detail. "Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the parcel of land Jacob had purchased...It was an inheritance for Joseph's descendants." (Joshua 24:32)

Can you imagine keeping up with a bone box for five hundred years? But Joseph had enough faith to believe before he died that his bones would one day rest in the land God had promised Abraham.

FAITH LESSON: God has a future home for you.

Joseph realized that although he had lived in Egypt for many years, it wasn't really his home. As we mentioned in the last message, we don't really feel at home here. Our real home is in Heaven.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1900s, pioneer missionary Henry C. Morrison was returning to New York after forty years in Africa. That same boat also bore the popular President Theodore Roosevelt. As they entered New York harbor, the President was greeted with a huge fanfare. The crowds were cheering and the bands were playing. There were signs, banners and billboards everywhere saying, "Welcome Home." The dear missionary and his wife with their luggage in hand quietly

made their way to the deck of the ship to exit. No one had come to welcome them back home. There were no bands playing or banners flying in their honor.

Henry Morrison went to his hotel room with a rather heavy heart. As he sat there on the bed, he asked his wife, "Honey, for 40 years we poured our lives into ministry and service. And yet we come back to America and not a single soul comes to welcome us home!" His wife came and sat down next to her husband. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said to him, "Henry, you have forgotten something, you're not home yet!"

And when Henry Morrison did arrive in Heaven a few years later, I believe he received a welcome far greater than Teddy Roosevelt received. He heard Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, and he heard the cheers of the thousands of Africans who had given their lives to Christ. Just remember, we're not home yet.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes