

Hebrews

The Classic Example of a Life of Faith

Hebrews 11:8-10

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Hebrews 11:10 (NASB95)

CONCLUSION:

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INTRODUCTION:

There are only two ways to live. One way, which is by far the most common way, is to live by sight. You base your life on everything that you can see and experience in this world. This is what Solomon called "living under the sun" in Ecclesiastes. The other way which is far less common, is to live by faith. You base your life ultimately on what you cannot see. The Christian way, of course, is the faith way. We have never seen God, or Jesus Christ, or heaven, or hell, or the Holy Spirit. We have never seen any of the people who wrote the Bible or an original manuscript of the Bible. However, we do see the results of the biblical writings concerning them. We have never seen any of the virtues that God commands or any of the graces that He gives. Yet we live in the conviction of all these things by Faith.

If it is impossible to please God without faith as the writer of Hebrews reveals to us in verse 6, then we need to be clear on the essentials or basics regarding faith. Our text points us to Abraham who is **the classic example of a life of faith**.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 11:8-12 (NASB95)

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Prayer

To learn about faith, it makes sense to go to Abraham. He is a composite of God's pattern of faith. He reveals the totality of the true faith life and all of the ingredients that make it up. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, and he is therefore presented to the Jews to whom the book of Hebrews was written as the key example of faith. They need to realize that Abraham was more than the father of their race; he also was, by example, the father of the faithful, the father of everyone who live by faith in God.

Galatians 3:29 (NASB95)

²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

It is not surprising that in the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 that Abraham receives more verses than any other person. His life illustrates verse 1.

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB95)

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Our text reveals two essentials of faith: Faith obeys God's call and lives as an alien in this world.

BODY:

I. Faith Obeys God's Call.

Hebrews 11:8a (NASB95)

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed...

This account is found in Genesis 12:1-4.

Genesis 12:1-4 (NASB95)

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

⁴ So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

God called; Abraham obeyed.

A. God's Call Initiates Our Obedience.

Before God called Abram, he lived in Ur of the Chaldees, in what today is Iraq. He was a pagan in a pagan city, descended from a line of idolaters.

Joshua 24:2 (NASB95)

² Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

He was about 70 when God called him. While people lived longer then than they do today, he was not a young man. We are not sure exactly how God called Abraham, but we are given a hint by Stephen.

Acts 7:2 (NASB95)

² And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,

Apparently, Abraham obeyed God by leaving Ur, but he settled in Haran for a few years until his father died. Then God issued the call that we just read in Genesis 12 and Abraham again obeyed by moving on to Canaan.

The point is, Abraham did move to Canaan on his own whim or by following his own dream. He was following **God's call**. Abraham considered God's call as greater than his own desires. Abraham's obedience was in response to God's call. This teaches us that we should not act on our own, apart from God's word. Faith must rest on His revelation in Scripture. Christianity is not a faith based on the religious speculations or philosophies of men, but rather on God's revelation, recorded in Scripture.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The word **call** or **calling** is used often in Scripture with regard to salvation, in two different ways. Sometimes it refers to God's **general** call to everyone to repent and believe the gospel.

Matthew 22:14 (NASB95)

¹⁴ For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

But also it is used in a more **specific** sense. Sometimes the call of God is to a specific individual. Paul uses it this way in Romans 8:30.

Romans 8:30 (NASB95)

³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Paul also wrote of a specific calling in II Timothy 1:9.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 (NASB95)

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

It was in this personal sense that God called Abraham to follow Him. He did not issue the call to the entire city of Ur, and not even to Abraham's father or brother. He called Abraham specifically and Abraham obeyed.

B. Obedience is the Response of Faith.

"*By faith Abraham ... obeyed.*" Genuine faith **always** obeys God. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never an idle faith. By its very nature, it results in obedience. If someone professes, "I believe," but does not obey, his faith is superficial and worthless.

ILLUSTRATION:

For example, if you say, "I believe that seat belts save lives," but do not buckle up and you are involved in a crash, your "belief" was worthless. If you **really** believe that seat belts save lives, you **will** buckle up. Buckling up demonstrates the reality of your faith.

Genuine saving faith is **obedient** faith. John tells us...

John 3:36 (NASB95)

³⁶ He who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Jesus warned us...

Matthew 7:21 (NASB95)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**

People often ask, how can I know the will of God in my life? God has chosen to speak to us through His word. If you want to know God's will, spend much time reading His word. When you read the scripture, you are hearing God speaking directly to you. He will direct you in the way that you should go.

Jesus also told the Jews who claimed Abraham as their father, but sought to kill Him...

John 8:39 (NASB95)

³⁹ They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus *said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.

Obedience proves that faith is genuine. It was by obedient faith that Abraham took off for an undetermined place.

Hebrews 11:8 (NASB95)

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

God did not tell him until later that the destination was Canaan. He did not send color brochures picturing the bountiful harvest of the land or describing the pleasant climate. There was no home awaiting him when he arrived from the long journey. He had to leave his culture, his familiar way of life in Ur and later in Haran, his friends, his family, and his earthly inheritance. It was a long and dangerous trip, made without a U-Haul or an interstate highway. But Abraham obeyed, risking everything on God’s word of promise.

Obedient faith abandons all to follow Jesus Christ. The call to follow Jesus is identical with the call to salvation:

Luke 9:23 (NASB95)

²³ And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

In the context, Jesus is talking about gaining or losing one’s soul for eternity. Sometimes a person must make a break with family, as painful as that may be. Jesus said...

Luke 14:26 (NASB95)

²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, **yes, and even his own life**, he cannot be My disciple.

He did not mean that we should despise or needlessly alienate our families. The Bible commands us to honor our parents and to love our families. New Christians especially need to be sensitive and show respect to family members who oppose the faith. But Jesus did mean that if our closest loved ones stand between us and Him, our choice is clear: We **must** follow Him.

Sometimes, even those from Christian homes face subtle or even direct pressure **not** to follow Christ fully. Sometimes parents want their children to get high-paying jobs which excludes most Christian service. Some parents do not want their children to go to the mission field, because they want them and the grandchildren nearby. But the Lord makes it clear: If it comes to love for Him versus love for family, we must follow Him.

God's call often entails other difficulties. Remember, by God's call, I am not referring to some special call for service that comes only to some. I am referring to God's call to salvation. It may result in rejection or persecution. It will involve bringing all your possessions and money under His lordship. It requires obeying God's Word even when it is inconvenient and difficult. It means seeking God's will rather than your own will in every decision.

Have you done that?

You may be thinking, "That is risky!" But actually it is riskier to run your own life than it is to obey God's call by faith. God knows everything about you. He is committed to work all things together for good for those who love Him.

Romans 8:28 (NASB95)

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

When you are calling the shots, you do not know what is best in every situation, and you have no ability to control the outcome of things. But God always knows what is best and He has the power to work it out for your ultimate good. Imitate Abraham, who by faith obeyed God's call.

II. Faith Lives as an Alien in This World.

A. The Life of Faith is a Pioneer Life.

Hebrews 11:9 (NASB95)

*⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;*

This is the only verse in the Bible that refers to Canaan as the promised land. The irony is, Abraham, the **heir** to the promised land, never owned a foot of ground in it except for the Cave of Machpelah, which he had to **buy** at full cost to bury his wife.

Acts 7:5 (NASB95)

*⁵ But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and *yet*, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him.*

It would be like God promising you and your descendants the land of Cuba. In obedience, you traveled there, but then you had to live the rest of your life in your camper! Not only you, but also your children's families lived in their campers, moving from place to place. After arriving in Canaan, Abraham **could** have asked "Where was the inheritance that I expected?" Just after Abraham arrived in the land of promise, there was a famine that drove him from the land. It might have seemed that he had been deceived by God. But he returned and lived in the land **by faith alone**.

The application is that as people of faith, we must often live in this world with conditions that seemingly contradict God's promises. The "health and wealth gospel" does **not** square with Scripture. Sometimes God's people face tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and even death.

As pilgrims, we need to adopt the mindset of trail blazers. When you travel in a foreign country, you stand out as different. They can spot you! They know that you are not one of them. You may temporarily adopt some of their local customs, so as not to be offensive, but on most things you think and live differently, according to the customs of your homeland and your faith.

B. The Life of Faith Focuses on Eternity.

Hebrews 11:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

As God's people, our homeland is heaven. We are just passing through this earth. Our mindset toward success, possessions, and purpose in life should be radically different than the mindset of the ungodly. Their hopes center in this life only, and so they try to accumulate all of the things and engage in all of the activities that they think will bring them happiness in this life. But as an alien in this world, our hopes must center in Jesus Christ and the eternal inheritance that we receive through Him. The things of this world do not allure us. We enjoy all that God provides, but our real treasures are those that eternal value in heaven.

A "**city with foundations**" stands in contrast with life in a tent, which has no foundation. Since God is both the architect and builder of this city, the foundations are solid and secure. The author of Hebrews is saying that when Abraham went out from his father's country to Canaan, he was not just counting on God's promise for that piece of real estate. He was looking beyond it to the promise of heaven. God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants and He later gave them that land. But the land was never the final or full realization of the promise. It was only an **earthly picture** of the full promise, which is the eternal city that God is preparing for His people.

CONCLUSION:

Abraham obeyed God's call and viewed himself as a stranger and sojourner in the land of Canaan. His focus was on heaven. We must follow his example!

What a Day That Will Be!