

The Journey of Faith

Texts: Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 22

General Direction

To begin our journey of faith through the Bible by studying faith episodes in the life of Abraham.
[Deliver this message after the reading for Week 1 is completed.]

Back Story

A good creation has gone bad. God created our world and declared everything good. But the effects of sin have entered the planet. The pivotal question is how God will go about winning back a rebel planet. God will choose a single couple, Abraham and Sarah, to know him uniquely and follow him completely. From this couple of faith will come the people of promise.

Sermon Purpose and Outline

As we watch Abraham respond in faith to God, we realize that faith in God pleases God. God will bless Abraham in incredible ways. He will become the father of the Jewish people. It is through Abraham's descendants that Jesus will come. Yet this blessing doesn't come until Abraham passes a series of challenges that demonstrate the true object of his faith.

Sermon Question: On the Journey of Faith, are you due for a faith-lift?

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| 1. Fear needs security. Faith takes risks. | Genesis 12:1-3 |
| 2. Worry wants predictability. Faith loves hope. | Genesis 15:1-6 |
| 3. Self-reliance holds on tight. Faith lets go. | Genesis 22:1-14 |

Sermon Introduction

Connection to the Overarching Theme: The Journey of Faith

This week we have embarked on a Journey of Faith. Reading through the Bible in ninety days is going to be a journey where we pass milestones of faith along the way: the faith of Abraham and Moses and David and Gideon; Nehemiah and Esther and Solomon and Jeremiah; Daniel, Haggai, Paul and John. In our journey through the Bible, we'll learn about the object of our faith, God, and the more we learn about God and how he has intersected with the course of human history, the more our faith will grow.

What is it about faith that's so important to our journey? If your journey is like mine, you don't always know where it's heading. You get stuck by roadblocks along the way. There are surprise accidents, rest stops of wondrous scenery, and wrong turns. If your journey is like that, you need faith to keep you going. Faith is knowing the unknowable, being certain in uncertainty, seeing what can't be seen, sure about what you hope for. The Bible has a definition of faith that sounds something like that:

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Are there elements of your life's journey you just have to take by faith? Has God ever thrown you a curve? Sprung a pop-quiz on you? Sent you into scary territory? Taken away your map? Asked you to do something audacious or foolish?

Creative Teaching Tool

Before we start looking at the faith journey of Abraham, let's first take a look at another Bible character we read about this week, and think about how much faith it took for him to follow God on his faith journey.

Show movie trailer for Evan Almighty.

http://wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16289

God may not have asked you to do something that audacious, but we're going to discover through Abraham's life that the Journey of Faith often involves acts of obedience that take us out of our comfort zone. Is God taking you out of your comfort zone right now? Maybe you need a faith-lift!

Sermon Question: On the Journey of Faith, are you due for a faith-lift?

1. Fear needs security; Faith takes risks

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Textual Explanation

God to Abram: "Leave your country, your people, your family. And go to a place I will show you. Where, you ask? Oh, you don't need to know that yet. Just start walking, and I'll tell you when to stop."

How many of us would sign up for that plan? That plan would feed into many of the fears most people have:

- Walk away from my home I have worked so hard to establish.
- Abandon my career and the trappings that give me my identity.
- Leave my family and my support structure where I feel secure.
- Let go of what I built up to fall back on someday if I needed it.
- Start off on a cross-country trip with no map, and no destination.
- And, it's okay, I can leave everything behind because this mystery place I'm going to will be a place of great blessing, and I can believe that because God says so. Riiiiiiight.

That plan would not be a plan for the faint-hearted! You'd have to overcome a lot of fear in order to step out and start walking.

Application

If fear is your issue, if you tend to be crippled or held back by the unknown, if you need security and hate taking risks, if you miss opportunities because you're afraid of what might go wrong, then you need a faith-lift!

Cross-Reference

When the writer to the Hebrews wanted to describe "faith," he used Abraham as his prime example. He went through a whole list of Bible Greats in Hebrews chapter 11, but it was on Abraham that he spent the most time, drawing out three examples from his life to demonstrate the essence of living by faith. This occasion in Abraham's life is his first example, and here's how he explains it:

Hebrews 11:8-10

⁸ **By faith** Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.** ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For **he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

If you remember our original definition of faith, it's exactly what we see at play here in Abraham's story. *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Hebrews 11:1). Abraham was so sure about his hope in God that he obeyed, even though he didn't know where he was going. Abraham was so certain of what he could not see, that even while he lived in tents, he knew there would come a day when God would build a city with foundations.

Timeless Principles

Here are some truths we can glean about faith from this episode in Abraham's life:

- The strongest faith develops when faith is placed in something strong. Place your faith in God's promises.
- The journey of faith often doesn't have a map, and may not even have a clear destination
- It takes faith to take risks
- It takes faith to not be the one in control
- It takes faith to keep going when you've lost what makes you feel secure
- It takes faith to stake your life on something you can't see or prove

Cross Reference

Are you held back by your fears? Do you resist obeying God when it involves a risk of losing your security? Has God asked you to do something that seems crazy, unwise, foolish, or downright scary? Here is the faith-lift verse for stepping out of your comfort zone and taking a risk:

Joshua 1:9

*Be strong and courageous. **Do not be afraid**; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you **wherever you go**.*

Notice the reason you can be courageous instead of afraid? Because when God asks you to obey, he gives you his presence, wherever that obedience takes you.

What risk is God asking you to take? Overcome your fear over losing your security by placing your faith in the God who will stay with you, no matter where your journey of faith takes you.

2. Worry wants predictability: Faith loves hope

Genesis 15:1-6

² *But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"*

⁴ *Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Textual Explanation

Abraham and Sarah have been promised a son, but years have elapsed since the promise was first made. Now Abraham is anxious. He is working out in his mind how God can make good on his promise. He is tired of waiting, and worried that God might need some help with this one.

Application

If you're a worrier, you can probably relate to how Abraham was feeling right about then. He had all the classic factors in place for a great worry session:

- God had been silent for years
- The plans he had weren't working out the way he thought they would
- The plans he had weren't happening on his timetable
- He didn't think his health would hold up long enough to see his dream come true

If you were in a stretch of years where you didn't hear from God, and nothing you thought was supposed to happen in your life was working out the way you hoped, and you were old enough to die any day now, wouldn't you be worried? The less predictable life is, the more worriers worry.

But God very clearly restates his promise, and gives Abraham a dramatic picture of what his future hope looked like. And there you see Abraham doing it again: *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Hebrews 11:1). In an act of faith, he lets go of his worry, and places his hope in what the Lord is promising him, even though he can't see how God is going to pull it off – even though it's not predictable! As an act of faith, Abraham replaces his worry with hope.

Cross-Reference

The writer to the Hebrews selects this as the second example of faith from Abraham's life. Look carefully at the reason he gives for why Abraham was eventually given a son:

Hebrews 11:11-12

¹¹ **By faith** Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father **because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.** ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Abraham's faith was placed in the promise-giver. In his worry, he was trying to predict what was going to happen to the promise now that it looked like he was about to die and Eliezer of Damascus was going to inherit his estate. But, "he considered the 'one who had made the promise' faithful," and God proved him right.

Illustration

I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining. And I believe in love, even when I don't feel it. I believe in God, even when he's silent. ~ Inscription on the wall in Nazi Germany

Has God been silent for a while? It is in God's silences that worry tends to breed.

- Has God been silent about a vision he gave you? David waited 13 years to become king (2 Samuel 3:1; 5:4)
- Has God been silent about your vindication? Noah had to endure ridicule for 100 years while he built a boat in a waterless land (Genesis 7).
- Has God been silent while you're waiting to be rescued? Joseph waited in a pit, then a prison (Genesis 37:24-28).
- Has God been silent about healing you? Paul had to learn to live with his infirmity (2 Corinthians 12:7).
- Has God been silent about giving you children? Abraham and Sarah waited for over 15 years for their promised son (Genesis 21:5).

Cross-References

So, if your world has lost all predictability, if God is silent right now and you don't know how to hope or how to behave or how to have faith, then here are some verses for you – these are faith-lifts for worriers!

Ecclesiastes 3:11 CEV
*God makes everything happen **at the right time.***

Matthew 6:34
*So **do not worry about tomorrow**; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.*

And, in case you're like Sarah who would have said to Abraham, "Don't just stand there, DO something!", here's the verse for you – it says, "Don't just do something, stand there!"

Psalms 37:7
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret.

Application

Has God gone silent? Has your world lost all predictability? Instead of worrying about your future, turn your worry into hope. Placing your faith in the God who promises to *make everything happen at the right time* (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

3. Self-Reliance holds on tight; Faith lets go

Genesis 22:1-14

¹ Some time later **God tested Abraham**. He said, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

² 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."

³ **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.

Textual Explanation

Abraham has a son named “Isaac”, which means laughter, because it was a joke that this old man would have a child. Isaac begins to grow up. Abraham looks at him and thinks, “That’s the future. All the promises have to be fulfilled through this child.”

Now we read the chilling words “Take your son, your only son, Isaac whom you love... and offer him as a sacrifice at the place I will show you.”

We are told that “God tested Abraham”. Note that the reader is told this. Abraham is not, however informed that this is a test. Twenty-five years ago, Abraham was asked to move, to part with his past. Now, is God asking him to part with his future?

If you were asked to let go of the very thing on which you had staked your future, would you let your fingers be pried open? Or, would your self-reliance kick in and say, “Not that! I need that! That’s what I’m counting on!”

Cross-Reference

Here’s how the writer of Hebrews tells the story:

Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁷ *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, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” ¹⁹ **Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.***

Timeless Principles

Here are some more truths about faith that Abraham’s story teaches us:

- Faith gets tested, and the tests don’t get announced!
- Faith in God cancels out faith in oneself.
- Faith in oneself cancels out faith in God.
- It takes faith to let go of what you normally rely on
- It takes faith to give up what it took you a long time to obtain
- It takes faith to believe in miracles

Cross-References

Matthew 19:26

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Philippians 4:13a

*I can do everything **through him** who gives me strength.*

Hebrews 11:6a

*And **without faith it is impossible to please God.***

Application

Has God called a pop-quiz on your faith? Is your self-reliance kicking in, and you've got your vice grip holding onto the thing you think you have to have to make it? Are you placing more faith in yourself than in God? Slowly open your hand, and back away from that thing you're depending on...your bank account, your job title, your achievement, your award, your image. Release it to God, and replace your faith in yourself with faith in God.

Closing

Like Abraham, we are embarking on a Journey of Faith. As we continue our reading from now until 12 weeks from now, we'll be reading faith stories, and getting faith-lifts along the way. Unlike Abraham, we know our Biblical destination. But, we don't know what kind of life change God has in mind for us while we're on the journey. If God is speaking to your heart about making a change in your life, you can rest assured that the change is going to take faith.

- It takes faith to **take a risk** leave behind your security.

Is God asking you to GO?

- It takes faith to **hope** when your plans don't go as predicted and God is silent.

Is God asking you to WAIT?

- It takes faith to **release** the things you usually depend on.

Is God asking you to LET GO?

No matter what kind of faith test God has sprung on you lately, you can pass it by remembering our faith-lift verse:

Joshua 1:9

*Be strong and courageous. **Do not be afraid**; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you **wherever you go.***