

FAITH IS PUTTING GOD FIRST

Hebrews 11:17-19

The Faith Chapter

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. I love to watch movies, and a few years ago I picked up on something that I thought was interesting. In most movies, God plays no role. He doesn't come up at all. People don't pray, they don't go to church, they don't talk about God, they don't factor God in their decisions, they don't read the Bible, etc. It's like God doesn't even exist in movie land. And then there are some movies that God plays a part, but just a small part. For example, take the Godfather trilogy – three movies about an Italian-American mafia family, the Corleones. The Corleones seem to go to their Roman Catholic church every Sunday; that seems to be important to them. But then the rest of the week God is absent. They go on stealing, and lying, and cheating, and killing people.
2. I think that trend is true for a lot of people today – God plays a small part in their life. They may believe in God, and go to church here and there, but other than that God doesn't really play a major role in their life.
3. Today we're going to see what God really wants to be to you. The kind of role He really wants to have your life. The kind of devotion that He really wants you to have. And it's going to shock you.
4. We're in a sermon series called "The Faith Chapter." We're studying Hebrews 11, which is all about faith.
5. Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith – faith is the assurance of what is hoped for, the conviction of what is not seen (Heb 11:1). In other words, faith is confidence in God, that He is who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do.
6. And then the rest of the chapter shows us what faith looks like in real life by illustrating it through the stories of the Old Testament heroes – people like Abel, and Enoch, and Noah.
7. The author of Hebrews devotes the most time to Abraham – the ultimate example of faith.

II. WHO IS ABRAHAM?

1. Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. The nation of Israel are his descendants. He son was Isaac, Isaac's son was Jacob, and from Jacob's sons came the twelve tribes of Israel.
2. But the New Testament tells us that the true children of Abraham are not his physical descendants, but those who follow his example of faith and put their trust in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Christians, we are the children of Abraham.
3. Hebrews 11 recounts three episodes from Abraham's life:

- i. The calling of Abraham. God told Abraham to leave his hometown and go to a land that He would show Him. Eventually God led Abraham to the land of Canaan and promised to give him that entire land as well as countless descendants.
- ii. The birth of Isaac. Even though Abraham and Sarah were old and Sarah was childless, God promised to give them a son through Sarah, and Abraham believed Him. Twenty-five years later, when Abraham was one-hundred and Sarah was ninety-five, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.
- iii. The sacrifice of Isaac. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Last week we looked at the first two episodes. Today we will focus on the third.

III. TEXT

1. **Hebrews 11:17-19** 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, 18 the one to whom it had been said, Your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 19 He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.

IV. CONTEXT

1. This story in Abraham's life is found in Gen 22:1-19. The story has five main parts:
 - i. The command (Gen 22:1-2). God commanded Abraham to go to the land of Moriah to offer his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering on one of the mountains.
 - ii. The obedience (Gen 22:3-10). Without any record of discussion with God, or arguing with God, or complaining, or prayer, or stress, Abraham simply obeyed. He saddled his donkey and set out with Isaac and two of his servants. At some point, Abraham told the two servants that he and Isaac would go the rest of the way alone. Isaac asked, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb?" Abraham responded, "God himself will provide." When they arrived, Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, bound Isaac and placed him on top of the Altar. Then he grabbed the knife to kill Isaac.
 - iii. The intervention (Gen 22:11-12). When Abraham took the knife to kill Isaac, the angel of the Lord called to him and said, "Abraham! Don't lay a hand on the boy, for now I know that you fear God."
 - iv. The provision (Gen 22:13-14). Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. He took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son, naming the place Yahweh-yireh, or Jehovah-jireh, The Lord Will Provide.
 - v. The reward. As a result of his obedience, the angel of the Lord promised to bless him, and to bless the entire world through him (Gen 22:15-18).
2. The first thing I want you to notice is that God tested Abraham.

- i. **Hebrews 11:17** “By faith Abrahah, when he was tested.”
 - ii. **Genesis 22:1** “After these things God tested Abraham.”
 - iii. The Greek word for “test” is peirazo. It can mean two things: A test or a trial, or a temptation. A test or trial is a difficult circumstance that God allows you to experience for spiritual benefits. A temptation is a solicitation to sin. In the case of Abraham, we know that he was being tested and not tempted because God was the author, and God doesn’t tempt us to sin (James 1:13).
3. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT TRIALS?
- i. God will put you through trials.
 - 1. **James 1:2** “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials”
 - 2. Notice the word “trials.” That’s the same word for “test,” “peirazo.” It is a difficult circumstance that God allows you to experience for spiritual benefits.
 - 3. Notice the word “whenever.” It doesn’t say, “Consider it great joy *if* you experience trials.” It says, “Consider it great joy *when* you experience trials.”
 - 4. God will test you. No matter how much faith you have, or how much you pray, or how holy you are, God is not going to let your life be smooth sailing. He is going to test you. He is going to allow you to experience difficult circumstances.
 - 5. In fact, any time you experience a difficult circumstance, it is a test. God is testing you.
 - 6. And God’s tests are not easy. He allows His children to experience severe difficulties.
 - 7. If you are going through a hard time right now, it is a test.
 - ii. The trial will not be more than you can handle.
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 10:13** “No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.”
 - 2. The word “temptation” in this verse is “peirazo,” the same word that means a test. The point of this verse is that God will not give you a test that you can’t pass. He will not give you a test that is too difficult.
 - iii. The trial will be beneficial.
 - 1. The book of James tells us why God tests us. Trials have four benefits.
 - a. Trials evaluate your faith.
 - i. **James 1:2-4** “2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full

effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

- ii. Notice that it says that a trial/test is the testing of your faith.
 - iii. Trials are faith tests.
 - iv. The word “testing” means to prove the genuineness of something.
 - v. Trials test the genuineness and strength of your faith.
 - vi. To test the genuineness of a diamond, jewelers often place it in clear water. A true diamond will sparkle with special brilliance, while a fake diamond will have almost no sparkle at all.
 - vii. In the same way, a true, mature Christian will shine when you put them in hard times. But if you are not a true Christian, or if your faith is weak, that will become evident too.
 - viii. Christians are like tea bags. The only way to tell what’s in them is to put them in hot water. So, God will put you in hot water at times to test your faith.
 - ix. If you pass the test, you will be encouraged, and God will be glorified. But if you fail the test, it will help you see your weaknesses and help you grow.
- b. Trials elevate your endurance.
- i. **James 1:2-4** “2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”
 - ii. Endurance is the ability to stand under pressure. It is staying power, the ability to keep on keeping on, to hang in there. Why do we need endurance? It takes endurance to accomplish anything great in life. To get ready for marriage, to build a great marriage, to overcome addiction, to raise great kids, to build a great business, to rise up the ladder at work, to get a good education, to grow in Christ – of this takes endurance.
 - iii. Endurance is a rare commodity today. Nobody wants to plan, and work hard, and wait for what they want. They want everything now. But true success requires endurance, and the only way to build up your

endurance is with problems. You can't get it from a sermon, or a Bible study, or by singing a praise song – only through trials.

- c. Trials expand your character.
 - i. **James 1:2-4** “2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”
 - ii. Eventually trials lead to spiritual maturity; to becoming like Jesus; and that's what God's goal is for you and me.
- d. Trials encourage your faithfulness.
 - i. **James 1:12** “Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”
 - ii. When you pass the test of trials, God will reward you. He will bless you in this life and in the next. In this life, the greatest reward is closer intimacy with Him. In the next life, it is eternal rewards.

4. So, God tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. And Abraham passed the test. He was obedient. He put God first.

5. Notice the ways that Abraham put God first.

V. HOW ABRAHAM PUT GOD FIRST

1. He put God before his son.

- i. **Genesis 22:2** “Take your son,” he said, “your only son Isaac, whom you love....”
- ii. Think about how precious Isaac was to Abraham. He was his only son with Sarah. His name was given by God. He was born as a result of God's promise. He was a miracle child – born when Abraham was one-hundred, and Sarah was ninety years old. He was Abraham's heir – all of his possessions were going to go to Isaac.
- iii. God commanded him to kill his son. And the amazing thing is that Abraham was obedient. He put God before his own son. He was willing to give up the most precious thing in his life for God.
- iv. Think about how much you love your children. As a parent you would do anything for your children; you would give your life for them. Faith is putting God first, even before your children.

2. He put God before his wife.

- i. Imagine the conversation that Abraham was going to have to have with Sarah when he got back home from the sacrifice. A hard conversation. Sarah would probably leave him, or never speak to him again, or kill him. In other words, God wasn't just asking him to sacrifice his son, but to sacrifice his marriage. But Abraham obeyed. He put God before his marriage.
- ii. This story reminds me of the words of Jesus.
 - 1. **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."
 - 2. **Matthew 10:37** "The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."
- iii. If you are married, think about how much you love your spouse. Think about how close you are. Think about how much they mean to you. Faith is putting God first, even before your spouse.

3. He put God before his comfort and happiness.

- i. The command to sacrifice his son must have made Abraham very uncomfortable. That was not an easy thing to do. It wasn't a fun thing to do. It didn't make him happy. But he did it.
- ii. As human beings, our comfort and happiness are very important to us. That's why a lot of people have an ALA relationship with God. ALA stands for "as long as." They will obey God as long as it doesn't make them uncomfortable; as long as it makes life better and easier; as long as it makes them happy; as long as it's convenient; as long as it doesn't hurt their finances; as long as they don't have to sacrifice. But as soon as religion gets hard, as soon as God's commands make them uncomfortable, and make life harder, and require sacrifice, they stop. They are religious, but they don't want to be too radical. They don't want to be a zealot.
- iii. But God demands that we have an EIR relationship. EIR stands for "even if relationship." Even if obedience means sacrificing our comfort and happiness, even if it means the loss of friends, and money, will still put Him first and obey Him.

4. He put God before his reputation.

- i. Abraham had to have been thinking about this. "What are people going to say about me when they hear that I killed my only son? What are my servants going to say? What are my neighbors going to say? What are my friends going to say? Everyone is going to think I've lost it. That I'm off my rocker. That I'm out of my mind. That I'm a fool. That I'm weird. That I'm an idiot." But he obeyed anyway. He put God before his own reputation.
- ii. As human beings we care what people think about us. Some of us care more than others, but we all care. If you don't care what people think about you at

- all, then you're probably a psychopath. We want people to like us. We want people to respect us. Nobody likes to be rejected, or mocked, or disliked.
- iii. But the problem is that a lot of people don't respect God's word. They hate it. And so if you obey God's word, they won't respect you; they won't like you; in some cases they will hate you. They won't think you're cool. They won't think you're hip. They will even accuse you of being evil and hateful.
 - iv. But faith is putting God first, even before your reputation. Even if people will reject you, and think less of you, and laugh at you.

5. He put God before his understanding.

- i. The hardest thing about God's command to sacrifice his son might have been that it didn't make sense. Why would God, who is against murder and human sacrifice, command Abraham to kill his son? Why would God want him to kill Isaac when He promised that Abraham's offspring would be traced through Isaac (Gen 21:12)? It didn't make sense, yet Abraham obeyed anyway.
- ii. In last week's sermon we learned that faith is trusting in God and not relying on your own understanding. We saw from the other episodes in Abraham's life that he obeyed without understanding where, he stayed without understanding why, and he believed without understanding how.
- iii. But this is where a lot of us get hung up. For many people, obedience needs to make sense. God's commands need to make sense. We need to see the logic behind His commands, and if we don't, we don't obey.
- iv. But faith is putting God even before your understanding. It is obeying God's commands even if you don't understand why.
- v. God taught this lesson to the Jews in the Old Testament by giving them hundreds of strict rules without any explanation. God commanded them about their diet, their dress code, their calendar, their finances, and mostly without any explanation. Obedience required faith.
- vi. Usually, if you put enough thought into it you can figure out the logic behind God's commands. It's not hard to see that His commands are always for good. But every once in a while you may come across a command in the Bible that you don't understand. What should you do? Faith is putting God before your understanding.
- vii. Why did Abraham put God before his understanding? Faith.
- viii. **Hebrews 11:19** "He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking."
- ix. Abraham didn't understand God's command, but he had faith. He had faith that God is faithful; He keeps His word, His promises. He promised Abraham many descendants, and He promised that they would come through Isaac, so surely God is going to keep His word. He also had that God could do the impossible. He didn't know how God was going to keep His promise if he

killed the child of promise, but God can do anything. He can raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary.

- x. When God gives you a command, you don't need to understand why. You don't need to understand how. All you need to do is trust Him. He is good. He loves You. He knows what is best. Trust and obey.
- xi. **Os Guinness** "As believers we cannot always know why, but we can always know why we trust God who knows why, and this makes all the difference."

VI. HOW TO PUT GOD FIRST

1. Give God the first hour of your day.

- i. Make a commitment to have a daily quiet time.
- ii. Start waking up thirty minutes to an hour early every day and spend time with God in prayer and Bible study.
- iii. I started doing this when in middle school, and I think it is the most important thing you can do for your spiritual health and growth.
- iv. Think about. To be a growing and healthy Christian you need to spend time in prayer, and you need to spend time in the word. How can you make sure that you do those things? You make an appointment. You make a commitment that every day from 6-7am you are going to have a daily quiet time.

2. Give God the first day of your week.

- i. Make Sunday church a priority.
- ii. The Bible commands us to be active and involved in church.
- iii. You can be saved and go to heaven without church involvement, but you can't be healthy and growing.
- iv. A lot of Christians haven't made this commitment. They go to church if they feel like it, if they have time, if they don't have anything else to do, if the preacher is talking about something interesting. If that's your attitude, then you're not going to be very consistent. To be a healthy Christian you need to commit to Sunday church.
- v. My parents instilled this in me when I was a kid. We never missed church – never. We didn't miss church to go camping, or to hunting, or to go fishing, or to do yard work, or study, or go to work. My parents didn't even let me spend the night at a friend's house on Saturday nights because they wanted to make sure that I went to church the next day. I wasn't allowed to stay up too late on Saturday night because we had church the next day. In all my years growing up, I don't ever remember anyone in my family staying home from church because of sickness.
- vi. To be a healthy Christian, you must make Sunday church a top priority.
- vii. Don't wait until you wake up on Sunday morning to decide if you are going to go to church. Make a decision now that Sundays are for God, and you're not going to let anything interfere.

3. Give God the first tenth of your finances.

- i. The Bible commands us to tithe – to give the first tenth of our finances to God. Not only that, but God promises to bless us if we are obedient.
- ii. Let's face it, money is very important to us. We need money. But God is more important than money. We need God more than we need money.
- iii. And to make sure that we put God before money, God commands us to tithe. If you can consistently put God first in your finances, then it will help you to put Him first in every area of your life.
- iv. How does tithing work? When you get paid, give the first ten percent to the church where you worship. It's as simple as that.

4. Give God the first place in your heart.

- i. In other words, make a commitment to total obedience.
- ii. From now on, make a commitment that you are going to obey all of God's commands.
- iii. Some of you are being partially obedient. There's a part of your life that you are refusing to hand over to God. Whatever you are refusing to obey God with is what is first in your heart.
- iv. Today, make a commitment that as soon as you learn of a new command from God's word, you will obey it right away.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Let me close with some good news.
2. You may be thinking today, "I haven't been putting God first. I haven't lived with that kind of faith. God must be mad at me. God is going to send me to hell."
3. God loves you, and He has provided a way for you to be forgiven.
4. Just as Abraham was willing to give up his only son for God, God has given up his only Son, Jesus, for us. Jesus came to earth and died on the cross to pay for our sins. And the Bible says that if we will believe in Jesus and ask Him to be the boss of our lives, God will forgive us and give us the gift of eternal life.