

## **NOT RELYING ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING**

**Hebrews 11:8-12**

**Hebrews – Week 5**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. I read a book by a pastor about how to help the people in your church grow in spiritual maturity, and he said it all boils down to faith. The key to raising spiritually mature believers is to help people grow in faith.
2. **He writes**, “Faith, or trust, is at the center of every healthy relationship. As trust goes, so goes the relationship. A break in trust signals a break in the relationship... At its core, Christianity is an invitation to reenter a relationship of trust with the Father... Walking by faith, again, is simply living as if God is who he says he is and that he will do everything he has promised to do. As a person’s confidence in God grows, he or she matures.” (Andy Stanely, *Deep and Wide*, 105.)
3. So, in this sermon series we’re focusing on growing in faith. And we’re doing that by studying The Faith Chapter – Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 is the best place in the Bible to learn about faith, because that’s what the entire chapter is about.
4. Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith.
5. **Hebrews 11:1** “Now faith is the assurance of what is hoped for, the conviction of what is not seen.”
6. To put it another way, faith is confidence in God, that He is who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do.
7. One author said that faith is extraordinary confidence in God in spite of what life throws at you (Andy Stanley).
8. After defining faith, Hebrews 11 illustrates or describes what faith looks like in real life by telling the stories of the heroes of the Old Testament. So far, we’ve looked at Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Today, we are going to look at the best example of faith in the Bible – Abraham.

### **II. WHO IS ABRAHAM?**

1. Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. He fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob, and then Jacob’s sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are known as the patriarchs of the Bible.

2. Abraham is the ultimate example of faith in the Bible. Here in Hebrews 11, more space is given to Abraham than any other person.
3. The New Testament tells us that Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, but that he is “the father of all who believe (Rm 4:11).” In fact, the New Testament tells us that all of the promises made to Abraham were for his seed, not seeds, and that seed is Christ; and only those who have faith in Christ are the true descendants of Abraham. That means that you and I (all Christians) are the true children of Abraham (Galatians 3:16, 29).
4. Abraham is the first example of the how salvation is by faith. **Genesis 15:6** says, “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” God forgave his sins and accepted him not because of his personal holiness, or because of his good deeds, but because he believed God’s word. The New Testament picks up on this and says that in the same way, God saves us not by works, but by faith.
5. Today I we’re going to what faith looks like in Abraham’s life.

**III. TEXT: Hebrews 11:8-12**

*8 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. 9 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. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

*11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—received the ability to procreate since he considered that the one who had promised was faithful. 12 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.*

**IV. BIG IDEA**

1. The big idea of this passage is that faith is trusting God and not relying on your own understanding.
2. One of the things that distinguishes people from animals is our desire for understanding. We want to know why.
3. If you have spent time with children, you know what it’s like to be peppered with the question, “Why?”

4. We want to know why. Why are things the way they are? Why is the law this way? Why should we believe in God? We need to understand. We also want to know how. How do things work? We want to understand. Animals aren't like that. Your dog doesn't want to know where his food came from, or how much it cost, or what's in it? Your dog doesn't want to understand anything. But we do.
5. And what we see from this passage is that faith is trusting in God and not relying on your own understanding. It is trusting God without having all the answers.
6. We see three examples of this from Abraham's life.

## V. **THREE EXAMPLES FROM ABRAHAM'S LIFE**

### 1. **He obeyed without understanding where.**

- i. **Hebrews 11:8** "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."
- ii. We are first introduced to Abraham in Genesis 11, when he lived Mesopotamia, which was far north of Israel in what is present-day Iraq. He was a polytheist, worshiping many gods. But in Genesis 12 the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham and told him to leave and move to a different land.
- iii. **Genesis 12:1-3** **1** The LORD said to Abram: Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.
- iv. God told Abraham to leave his land and move. God promised to make him into a great nation; to bless him; to make his name great; and the whole earth would be blessed through him.
- v. But notice that there's one big thing God didn't tell Abraham: the location. Where was Abraham supposed to go? North, south, east, or west? God didn't tell him. He just told him to leave his land and go "to the land I will show you."

- vi. In other words, God told him to follow without telling him where He was leading him.
- vii. What did Abraham do?
- viii. **Genesis 12:4** “So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him...”
- ix. **Hebrews 11:8** “He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.”
- x. He obeyed. He didn’t know where to go, but he put his house up for sale, he packed up his possessions, and then he just started traveling, trusting that God would eventually show him where to go.
- xi. This is why obedience always requires faith, because you never know where it will take you.
- xii. For example, obedience might make your life harder; it might lead to persecution; it might lead to sacrifice; it might get you in trouble; it might lead to ridicule; it might lead to the loss of friendships; it might lead to losing your job; it might lead to financial difficulties. And sometimes things turn out okay, and obedience makes things better. But faith obeys without knowing where it will lead.
- xiii. When Lydia and I were in seminary, she was working full-time. But when she got pregnant with our first child, she wanted to come home to be a full-time mother. So, our idea was for her to open up an at-home child-care business. That way she could still earn money and at the same time be at home with her child. But there was a problem. We lived in seminary housing, and we heard a rumor that it was against the run a day care out of your house on campus. So, we had a decision to make. We could just disobey the rules and hope we don’t get caught, or we could ask for permission. We believed that it was morally wrong to break the seminary rule, so we decided to ask for permission. We didn’t know where that would lead. We were very nervous about it. We prayed hard. And to our surprise, the seminary gave us permission.

- xiv. Faith is obedience without knowing where it will take you. Abraham exemplified this when he obeyed God and left his home, not knowing where he was going.
- xv. Faith is like signing a contract without reading it. You would never do that, right? You would want to read over it carefully. You would want to know what you are signing, and what the consequences are for breaking the contract. But faith is like signing a contract without reading it. The reason we can do that is because of who is telling us to sign the contract. It's not an imperfect human being; it is God. And God is perfectly holy, perfectly just and fair, perfectly loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful. So, because of who God is, and because we trust Him, we can obey Him without understanding where it will lead us.

## **2. He stayed without understanding why.**

- i. **Hebrews 11:9** "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."
- ii. Eventually God told Abraham where to go – Canaan (present-day Israel). God promised to give Abraham and his descendants the entire land of Israel. But when Abraham arrived, the land was already occupied. Why did God promise Abraham a piece of land that was already owned and occupied? He didn't know, but he stayed faithful to God. He set up his tents and settled in the land as a foreigner. One year went by, then two, then three, then four. Still, Abraham was no closer to owning the land. Why wasn't God giving Abraham the land? Why did God lead him to a place that was already owned and occupied? Abraham still had no answers. He didn't know why God was doing this. But he stayed faithful to God. Abraham lived one hundred years in the land of Canaan and then he died. In all that time he never owned the land (other than a graveyard he bought when Sarah died), and he never knew why. Until his dying day he stayed faithful to God, and he continued to believe, God will give this land to me and my descendants. He never turned from God. He never turned back to worship idols. He never shook his fist in anger at God. He never called God a liar.

He didn't abandon the promised land and go back to home. He stayed faithful without knowing why.

- iii. That's the way life usually goes, isn't it? We experience hardships, and we don't know why. "Why did you lead me here, God? Why are you allowing this, God? Why don't you fix this, God? Why aren't you answering my prayer, God?" And we usually don't get an answer. God doesn't promise to give us explanations.
- iv. And there are two possible responses to this: First, some people turn away from God. They might turn to sin for comfort, or for a solution; or they might get angry with God; or they may stop believing altogether. Second, some people stay faithful to God, even though they don't understand why. They don't know why God is doing what He's doing, but they stay faithful.
- v. The second response is faith. Faith is staying without knowing why. It is staying with God, staying faithful to God, continuing to obey and serve, even though you don't know why God is allowing you to go through such hard times.
- vi. My uncle is a good example of this. When he first got married, he decided he wanted to be a pastor. Even though he was married to a Christian woman, his wife divorced him a few years after they had their second child. Not only that, but she took the children and wouldn't let them have anything to do with their father. Why did God allow that? He didn't know, but he stayed faithful to God. Years went by and met another wonderful Christian woman and they married. They had twin boys, but they had problems. One of them was born with only one arm, and the other was born with a weak heart. Why did God allow this? My uncle didn't know why, but he stayed faithful to God. Not long after this, the twin with the weak heart died. Why did God allow this? He didn't know, but he stayed faithful. A few years later they had another child, a beautiful little girl. For the first few years she was perfectly healthy, but then she was diagnosed with cancer. She went through very difficult treatments that caused permanent damage, and she lost all of her hair. Why was God allowing this? He didn't

- know why, but he stayed faithful to God. He and his wife continue to love and serve the Lord to this day. That's faith.
- vii. The text gives us an interesting insight into where Abraham got the strength to stay.
  - viii. **Hebrews 11:10** "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."
  - ix. This verse is talking about heaven – the city whose architect and builder is God. Abraham was looking forward to heaven. In other words, the reason he was able to endure the hard times and not give up is that he was not expecting earthly rewards from God; he was looking forward to heavenly, eternal rewards.
  - x. If you are expecting God to reward your faithfulness with health, wealth, and prosperity in this life, then you will be highly disappointed. You'll either conclude that God is unfaithful, or that you're not worthy. You're going to struggle to stay faithful during the hard times. But if your focus is on heavenly rewards, eternal rewards, then you will find strength.

### **3. He believed without understanding how.**

- i. **Hebrews 11:11-12** "11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—received the ability to procreate since he considered that the one who had promised was faithful. 12 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."
- ii. As a side note, some translations and scholars have Sarah as the subject of verse 11, and some have it as Abraham. For various reasons, I believe Abraham is the subject, so this is actually the alternative reading suggested by the CSB footnote.
- iii. The point is that God made another promise to Abraham – to give him many descendants, as many as the stars in the sky. The problem was that Abraham's wife was barren; she had no children. And Abraham and his wife were beyond child-bearing years; he was 75 and she was 65. How was this possible? How was God going to accomplish this? Notice how Abraham responded to God's word.

- iv. **Genesis 12:5-6** 5 He took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “Your offspring will be that numerous.” 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
- v. Abraham believed God, even though he didn’t know how. That’s faith.
- vi. The Bible tells us all kinds of things without telling God how. It tells us that God created the universe out of nothing. It tells us that Jesus rose from the grave. It tells us that when we die our souls will immediately go to heaven. It tells us that God hears all of our prayers at the same time. It tells us that God will work all things together for the good. It tells us that God is good, even though He allows evil and suffering in the world. It tells us that we will be happier if we avoid sin and live obediently. It tells us all these things, but it doesn’t tell us how. But faith is believing without knowing how.
- vii. God initially promised Abraham many descendants when he was 75. At the age of 99, God gave Abraham more information. He told him that in a year, he would have a son, and he would be born to Sarah. In other words, God would finally fulfill His promise to Abraham when he was 100 and Sarah was ninety years old. And sure enough, one year later, they had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob, and from Jacobs eleven sons came the nation of Israel.
- viii. God’s word is true. He fulfills His promises. He is faithful. How does He do things? I don’t know how, but I know He is faithful.
- ix. Faith is believing without knowing how.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

1. Abraham obeyed without understanding where. He stayed without understanding why. He believed without understanding how. All of these are examples of faith, because faith is ultimately trusting God and not relying on your own understanding.
2. This is what my dad’s favorite verse is all about.

3. **Proverbs 3:5-6** “5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.”
4. Notice verse 5. The author of Proverbs often used a form of writing called parallelism in which you make a statement, and then you say it a second time but in a different way to help the reader understand. That’s what we see here. First, he says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” To explain what that means he writes, “and do not rely on your own understanding.” Faith is not relying on your own understanding.
5. Why should we trust God without understanding, without having all the answers? Because of what we already know about Him. You don’t trust someone just because you tell you to trust them. Trust is based on what you already know about them. We trust God because of what we already know about Him. He is holy (without sin). He is all-loving (as proven by the cross). He is faithful, always keeping His promises. And His knowledge and power are unlimited (as proven by His work of creation). Therefore, it makes sense to trust what He says about the future.
6. Notice that it says that faith is not relying on your own understanding. Why shouldn’t we rely on our own understanding? Because our knowledge is very limited.
7. There’s a movie about Pete Maravich’s upbringing called *The Pistol*. His dad was a college basketball coach. During a practice his dad took a basketball and a black marker. He pointed to the basketball and said, “This ball represents everything there is to know about the game of basketball.” Then he drew a black circle and said humbly, “This circle represents what I know.” Then he made a dot on the ball, hardly big enough for the players to see, and said, “This is what you know.” What was his point? His point was that they should trust His leadership because He knew a lot more than them. We should trust in God and not rely on our own understanding because God knows infinitely more than us. We don’t even fully understand ourselves, much less everything else. But God does.
8. Faith is trusting God and not relying on your own understanding.