
LIVING ON A PROMISE

Hebrews 11:1–3,8–16

¹Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁸By 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. ⁹By 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. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹²And 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.

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

WHAT DOES A CRISIS OF FAITH LOOK LIKE?

I think, by now, I have seen what a crisis of faith looks like in a 1-year-old boy. Mom has the Cheerios. Mom has never failed to have Cheerios. But the Cheerios are in the diaper bag right now, so the boy can't see them. Hence the crisis. As soon as he swallows one, the boy cries as if to say, "Mother, whom I love, whom I trusted! I thought you cared for me! But you have betrayed me! For I have no Cheerio. Why oh why would you do such a— Oh, look! Another Cheerio!" It's a crisis because this boy, who shall remain nameless, can't see what he wants to see.

By now, I have also seen what a crisis of faith looks like in a 75-year-old woman. It's less humorous than a one year old. One sickness stole her husband of 50 years. Another stole her only child. And so, even though she knows all about God, and God has never failed to take care of her; she wonders if God is there. Or if he is there, maybe he's not such a wonderful guy. Just like a child she can't make sense of what she is experiencing.

What does a crisis of faith look like for you? Maybe you've prayed that God would stop some bad thing from happening, and then God let it happen. Perhaps you've known God to be loving and kind for years, and then something makes you wonder about that. It happens to faithful Christians every day. When it happens to you, you will be **LIVING ON A PROMISE**. By that I mean, you get no energy from what you see. You can't make sense of what you experience, so you get energy and confidence when you remember what God has promised to do for you. That's my way of summarizing what God tells us about faith.

THE HEBREWS' CRISIS OF FAITH

God knows that we often experience crises of faith, and so he wrote many Bible chapters addressing faith. Today we're looking at Hebrews chapter 11. The author is writing to Hebrew Christians who are going through a crisis of faith. They don't know if they should trust Jesus or not because at their time in history, things did not look good for Christians. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer to help them live not based on what they see but live on God's promise.

He starts by telling them a little proverb about what it looks like to live on a promise. "**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**" (Hebrews 11:1). A one-year-old freaks out when he can't see where the next cheerio is coming from. And sometimes, we freak out when we can't see what God is up to behind the scenes. In those moments, we can't see what God is doing. We're living on a promise. But we are not the first people to do this.

THE ANCIENTS WERE LIVING ON A PROMISE

The writer says, **“This is what the ancients were commended for.” (Hebrews 11:2).** Who are the ancients? They are all the people from the Old Testament Bible stories that children learn in Sunday school. You know them, the people who show up on the Bible timeline before Jesus. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, Esther. Those people didn’t have magic eyes to see what God was up to behind the scenes. They went through troubles, and when they couldn’t understand what God was doing, they had to trust his promise. In fact, the trusting was God’s favorite part of their stories.

In Hebrews 11, God mentions more than 15 different Old Testament ancients who went through hard times just like you do, 15 people who were living on a promise from God, just like you do.

Today we are going to focus on just one character, Abraham. He was born about 4000 years ago in the city of Ur. Nowadays, it would be in the country of Iran. Abraham spent a lot of his life living on a promise from God. As you read through Hebrews 11, it says five times that Abraham lived “by faith,” trusting God when he couldn’t see what God was up to behind the scenes. We’re just going to look at the first three.

Abraham teaches us what it means to be...

LIVING ON A PROMISE.

1. **You take God at his word.**
2. **You wait on God’s timing.**
3. **And you know God will keep his promise.**

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

The first one is verse 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.” (Hebrews 11:8).** That’s seriously how Abraham’s story starts in Genesis. God says, “Go!” And Abraham says what anyone would say, “Where?” And God says, “Go.” It’s incredible enough that Abraham did it, but you know what’s hard for me to imagine is Abraham walks back into his house and has to try to explain that to his wife, Sarah. How did that conversation go? God said, “Go,” so they went. They couldn’t see where they were going, but they knew God’s promise. “I will give you a place to live, and you will get that land as an inheritance. I promise.” They took God at his word because they were living on a promise.

You can take God at his word too. God hasn't asked you to pick up and go to a mystery land, but I bet you do have some questions about what's going on in your life. What job will you have when you grow up? Will you ever get married? Will you make the living you want to? Will you be able to retire? How long will God let you stay on earth? I don't know. You don't know. Only God knows. And God has promised that he has a good plan for you, and he'll be with you every step even when you can't tell what he's up to. You can take him at his word because you are living on a promise from God.

WAIT ON GOD'S TIMING

God didn't keep his promise to Abraham right away either. He had to wait on God's timing. Verse 9 says, **“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.” (Hebrews 11:9).** God promised to give a whole country to Abraham, it was called the promised land, in Canaan. But Abraham didn't just show up and become the king of Canaan. He had to live there like a stranger in a foreign land— not so fun.

I have a friend who's been in the United States for one year. His home country is close to Abraham's home country— Afghanistan. Every day he faces reminders that he is not home. Americans talk differently, listen to different music, and drive differently. We don't celebrate any of his favorite holidays. I'm proud to call him my friend because he works hard to overcome all the challenges, but he has had a grueling year. My Afgan friend knows how Abraham felt, but do you know where my friend lives? In a beautiful two-story duplex in Oshkosh. Abraham lived in a tent. Not just for a year but many years! I like camping but not for a decade! Abraham did it the whole while he was waiting for God to keep his promise. Can you guess how long God waited before he kept his promise? 500 years. That's right. Abraham died while he was still living in a tent, and his son Isaac lived in a tent, and his son Jacob. Hebrews says, **“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.” (Hebrews 11:13).**

Maybe you feel like a stranger on earth sometimes. Living on a promise can be uncomfortable, especially when you want God to keep his promise right now! But waiting on God's timing is good. All those years Abraham lived in tents kept his eyes focused on his heavenly mansion. Maybe God is making you a bit uncomfortable to keep your eyes on heaven too. You can wait on God's timing because you don't need everything to be perfect on earth. You're living on God's promise of heaven.

KNOW GOD WILL KEEP HIS PROMISE

Abraham knew God would keep his promise, even if he couldn't understand how. A classic example of that is in verse 11. **“By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this 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.” (Hebrews 11:11-12).**

Do you remember this story? When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised him he would have a son. None of our 75-year-olds would appreciate it if I said they were as good as dead. You're much better than that! But the author of Hebrews says, when it comes to having a baby, a 75-year-old couple has about as much chance as a dead couple. But that's what God said. Then God made Sarah and Abraham wait another 25 years before they had the baby! She was 90 years old!

Do you know one of my favorite words in that whole passage? “Considered.” Sarah considered God faithful to his promise. That word, “consider,” is not the word for a blind leap into the dark, mindlessly wishing God will catch you. Considered means Sarah engaged in an intellectual process. You could translate it, “She gave it careful thought. She ran the numbers.” When she thought about what she could see, she was too old, Abraham was too old. There's no way God could keep his promise. But when she thought long and hard about her God, he promised to take care of her and he did. He promised they'd make it to a new land, and they did. She didn't just run the numbers, she ran the promises of God through her mind and she considered God faithful, “My God keeps his promises.”

When you have a crisis of faith, would you consider the promises of your God? How he's gotten you through tough times in the past, how he's worked things out when you didn't see how it would work out? Run the promises of God through your mind, the ones he's made for you and to other believers. Then you'll know that God keeps his promises, and you can live on his promise.

“I’LL SHOW YOU LATER”

That's the story of Abraham. God just kept saying, “I'll show you later.” God said “Go!” “Abraham says, “Where?” “I'll show you later.” God says, “I'll give you land!” “Where?” “I'll show you later.” “You're going to have a baby!” “How?” “I'll show you later.” All that time after God promised but before Abraham saw the promise come true, all that time he was living on a promise.

We live in that time. 1-year-olds want to see where the next cheerio is coming from. And God says, “I'll show you later.” 75-year-olds want to see the purpose

for their pain. God says, “I’ll show you later.” Will you have enough money? Will your relationship make it? Me personally, I’m transitioning between being a pastor at Mount Olive and serving in Milwaukee. I want to see where my family will live. I want to see what our budget looks like down there. I want to know if I’ll ever meet people as wonderful as you. Right now, God is saying, “I’ll show you later, and I promise to take care of you.” I bet a lot of people here are wondering where you’ll get the next pastor. Will he be young or old? When will he get here? For now, God is saying, “I’ll show you later, but I promise to take care of you.” Until “later” all of us are living on his promise.

TWO REASONS TO LIVE ON GOD’S PROMISES

While we do that, the Holy Spirit says, “Look at Abraham!” If you want some proof that you can trust God, look at Abraham. In his life, nothing seemed to make sense. But he went forward one step at a time, trusting God and his trust was proved right. God kept every promise. You can be confident he will keep his promises to you too.

The second piece of evidence to look at comes from the very next chapter. Hebrews 12 says, **“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2). The very best evidence that God keeps his promises is Jesus. Jesus saw the cross, where he would endure so much pain and guilt. He didn’t want to do it. But he had promised. He promised he would take your place under God’s judgment. He promised he would take on the shame you had earned so that you could receive his innocence. And when Jesus makes a promise, no matter unlikely, no matter how difficult it is to keep it, he keeps it. If you doubt God is real, if you wonder if he’s good, if you ever have a crisis of faith, fix your eyes on Jesus, who keeps his promises. Trust him and you’ll live forever. He promised.

Amen.