

# **BY FAITH**

Core Group Leader's Guide  
Fall 2021



# GUIDE TO THE LEADER'S GUIDE

Some quick guidance on how to use the curriculum when preparing for your group.

## Contents

1. Vision
2. What's in the curriculum?
3. How to use the curriculum (focus in here!)
  - a. Before Group
  - b. During Group
4. Helpful group tips
5. A model small group time

## 1. Vision

This semester's vision is to take our cues from the faithful. Literally. In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews includes a list of faithful—full of faith—persons from the Old Testament for us to emulate. Instead of a “Hall of Fame,” this is a “Hall of Faith.” This semester, we're going to focus on a few of those faithful and ask: why are they included in this Hebrews list? How did they exhibit faithfulness to Christ before Jesus was born? And how can we learn from their examples?

We often think of the New Testament as the hallmark of the Scriptures. You know, the really important stuff, to which the Old Testament is just an introduction. In reality, ever since Jesus started teaching about himself and Paul started writing about Jesus, the Old Testament has proved not just to be an appetizer. It's the meat-and-potatoes main course. It proclaims—shouts, even—the gospel on almost every page. To truly understand Christ, his mission, and his Kingdom, we need to be attentive to what God is doing throughout the entire Scriptures. We need only, as Christ himself said, eyes to see and ears to hear the gospel message on every page of the Scriptures.

This curriculum focuses each week on one faithful person from the Old Testament. So, we'll be jumping around a bit. Hopefully, however, you'll find the consistent thread of Christ running through every story.

## 2. What's in the Curriculum?

The curriculum has 9 major parts. We know this is a lot! But this is NOT a step by step guide for leading the group. These 9 things are resources for you to soak and grow in. We'll talk about

that more in the next section. Here are the 9 things in each week of the leader's guide:



**1. Historical Context & Background:** These are important notes about when the book was written, the context it was written in (or why it was written), and notes about how it fits into the surrounding chapters within the book of the Bible.



**2. Related Scriptures:** These are references to other parts of the Bible relevant to the week's discussion.



**3. Key Terms:** This is a glossary of important or confusing terms in the passage.



**4. Key Themes:** This is the meat of the guide. These are the various major ideas which come to the fore in the passage.



**5. Quotes & Stories:** These are quotes and anecdotes which illustrate something from the passage. This is to get your imagination going, or to hear about someone who lived out the passage well. You can share these with the group if you want, or not.



**6. 3 Main Points:** These are what we think are the most important points to walk away from the passage understanding. If your disciples left group that night only knowing 3 things, this is what they should know.



**7. Discussion Questions:** These the potatoes of the guide. Here are questions designed to open up conversation about the passage, the themes, and lead to thinking about personal application. They usually aren't in any particular order.



**8. Application & Practice:** These are a list of 3-5 ways your disciples can choose to apply something from the week's discussion to their lives. It's at your discretion how to use this, but do not ignore application. It's obviously the goal.



**9. Going Deeper:** These are extra resources for you, the leader—sermons, books, articles, etc. about the passage or its themes. Use them if you want; don't if you don't.

### 3. How to use the Curriculum

So you get to your week and we plo down this massive tome in front of you. (Really it's only like 4-5 pages, which is still a lot, but a pretty quick read). What do you do with it?

**Do not take the guide into group with you.** It is *not* a step-by-step walk through of a Core Group. *If you do this, your group will probably suck because your group will think you have all the answers so why should they even try?* It will certainly suck more than if you prepared for it. Don't be lazy. Don't be lame. **What this does mean, though, is that you choose what information/resources you take. And that's the purpose of it.** We've given you an arsenal to choose from, and you're just going to take the best weapons for your group. What this also means is that you've got to prepare for group beforehand. And it should take an hour or so to do it.

#### Before Group

So you get the document. First, ignore it. Crack open your Bible and read the passage yourself. Spend time soaking in the Scripture, and pray for God to illumine what needs highlighting in your group. After spending a few minutes doing that, grab a notebook, pen, and highlighter and start reading through the document section by section. **Make notes, highlight what you think**

**is important. The goal here is to compile about a page worth of notes to have during group.** So obviously you won't use everything!

Think of the members in your group. As you read the guide, make notes about what will help them. **Much of the guide is only for you.** Treat it that way! Sections like the context and terms are for you to know in case a question or confusion comes up. Don't spend 10 minutes defining what a drachma is. But know it in case someone asks. In the guide there are neat tidbits that you shouldn't spend forever talking about in group, but they're there for you—the leader—so you can guide the conversation to the important conversations you need to have.

So read it and jot down a line or two of helpful information (as you deem it) about context and terms. Read through the key themes and 3 main points section, looking for the couple of things you really want your group to key in on. **Don't forget the goal stated above.** As you're reading the guide, write down those points and the way that the passage shows those points. Write why you think it's important. Go to the discussion questions section. You shouldn't pick every question, and you can obviously come up with your own as well! **Write down the questions you think will be engaging, deep, and fruitful in discussion. Ultimately you want questions which lead students to the points you want them to walk away with.** Make sure you choose questions which ultimately invite students to think about how this passage applies to them.

Look through the application and practice section. You want to give your group members options for ways they can practically begin to live what the Scripture illustrates. Some are fun and quirky, some are serious and somber. None are overburdensome! Write down all of ours, or you can substitute your own! **But don't skip the application. We must begin living life with God, not just talking about him.** Finally, take 5 minutes and pray for your group members by name.

## In Group

Take your notes to group. Be intentional about setting the order of what you do in group. You don't have to stick to this 100%, but it's super helpful to have a structure. **Know what kind of flow you want your group to have.** Is your group a chatty group that thrives on discussion? Load most of your time there. Just make sure you have great questions. Does your group appreciate the depths of Scripture by walking through it systematically? Organize your discussion: walk through the passage in short chunks. Pick and order discussion/application questions in a way which allows you to do this.

I would always read the passage twice. For the first reading, you can give the important pieces of context you picked (if any), but soak up Scripture early. Read the passage aloud first. For the second reading, let them read it silently by themselves. Give plenty of space for this. **But also, give them something to do during the reading, so it isn't aimless! There are great types questions that every good reader asks when they read the Bible. Here are some:**

1. What words, phrases, images, or verses stick out to you? What do you think the Holy Spirit is trying to say to you by drawing your attention there?
2. Where do you see the gospel in this passage? How do you see Jesus here?

3. What do you think the original hearers would have heard from this passage?
4. What does this passage mean for us, for me, on campus in 2020?
5. What do we learn about God from this passage? What do we learn about people?
6. What images or words are repeated in this passage, and what's associated with them? What other parts of Scripture does it remind me of?

Pick 2-3 questions from this list for them to answer in their journals as they read. Also have them write down any questions they have about the text in their journals.

Discuss what they wrote down first. Then move onto the rest of the discussion questions you've prepared. **To the best of your ability, don't just preach at them. The key themes section of the leaders' guide isn't sermon material. It's knowledge that allows you to direct conversation.**

## 4. Helpful Group Tips

- Prepare prepare prepare. Wing-it groups are always worse than prepared groups.
- Sit beside, not across from, the over-talker.
- Let students lead discussion as much as constructively possible.
- Don't be afraid of awkward silences, provided the questions are good.
- If students are missing a main point, give it to them shortly. Then ask them if they agree or disagree. Talk it through.
- Go on helpful tangents. Sometimes these are the most important conversations.
- If a question falls flat, move on quickly. Don't make it a slow death.
- Don't pretend you do know when you don't.
- Don't let group be shallow. Ask tough questions if you have to.
- No matter how neat they find questions about the text, always move group toward seeing themselves in the passage.
- Make room for doubt. Jesus did.
- Don't batter your group for an hour each week talking about what sins they've committed. Confession should be willing and healing.
- Don't ignore sin. It festers.
- Practice what you preach. Own it when you don't.
- Hold students accountable for doing the practices they volunteered for.
- Have fun.
- If your group persistently stinks, ask for help from a lead staff member.
- Pray for your group.

## 5. A Model Small Group Time

This is an example, so it's not how your group has to flow. It's just how one group could go on any particular night.

**Begin with prayer (5 min)**

As you move from group hang time into bible study, have someone pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation and lead you to walk closer with Jesus.

**Read the passage (15 min)**

As the leader, read the passage aloud to the group while they follow along or actively listen. Give some space for a 2nd reading. Have each person in your group find a comfortable spot to read. Give them a question or two to guide their reading. Open up Spotify and play a chill track, or just leave it silent. Each person individually reads, but it's active reading. They read, paying attention for whether any of the verses grab their attention, it may be the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They should take notes or write down thoughts in their journal about those promptings, the questions you asked, or questions they have about the text.

**Discuss the passage (40 min)**

Start off the discussion by having the group share what thoughts they have from the passage and what they wrote down in their journals. Move through questions and group discussion, especially focusing in on application the longer you go.

**Practices, Life Debrief, Video, Prayer, Chill (25 min)**

Spend time talking about the practices your group had last week, especially after you have them choose new practices for this week.

But then use this time for whatever you think best suits your group and this week. You could move into individuals sharing about their week. If your group is bigger, you can break off into smaller groups of 3 or 4. You could do a special activity, like watching a Bible Project video! Or you could even do some extended reflection or prayer time, individually or as a whole group. You have the freedom to lead this time! But don't wing it! Anticipate what will work best and have a plan for how to spend this time!

**Close in Prayer (5 min)**

# HEBREWS 11

## Week 1: By Faith



### Historical Context & Background

Little is known about the origins of the book of Hebrews. The author and audience are unknown and the date of writing is contested. We are even unsure what kind of writing it is. Is it a letter? A sermon? Hebrews is a mysterious masterpiece. What we do know is that Hebrews was likely written to a group of Jewish Christians who, as is revealed in chapter 10, are enduring persecution and imprisonment because of their faith. Hebrews seeks to show that Jesus is in fact the one toward whom all the Old Testament points, and so because of that the Jewish Christians (and all Christians) must persevere in their faith, finishing by declaring the righteous one will live by faith (Heb. 10:38-39). This raises a question: How? What is the faithful life? Many of these Jewish Christians abandoned their commitment to Jesus in the face of this persecution. By identifying their spiritual heroes, the author shows how those struggling can remain faithful to their Christian commitment by giving them examples of faithfulness.

In Hebrews 11, the author gives a long list of Biblical characters who displayed faithfulness despite their circumstances. The spiritual heroes mentioned in this passage had not yet received God's promise of a savior. In Jesus, God sends the long-awaited savior. Hebrews implores us to recognize that Jesus is our savior and to remain faithful, like the characters in Hebrews 11, to God regardless of present circumstances.



### Related Passages

James 1:2-4 - James encourages believers to take joy in their suffering because through hardship we become one with Christ and grow in perseverance. This is not to say that you have to be happy in the midst of suffering, but that we can take joy in the remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

James 2:18-19 - James reminds believers that even the demons believe there is a God. So, our faith is empty without action.



### Key Terms

**Faith:** The Greek word, *pistis*, means faith. This word is rich with meaning and is the central theme of the passage. It will be the focus of the stories we will read and discuss this semester. The author uses the word *pistis* twenty-five times in this chapter alone! So, this concept will be worth paying attention to. We are given a definition of *pistis* in the first verse: "Now faith is



confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (NIV). Biblical faith is not just believing God exists.

**Reputation:** The author states that the heroes of faith earned a good reputation (Hebrews 11:2). This can be confusing when we are taught that we do not have to earn our salvation. A better understanding of this teaching is that there is nothing we can do in order to earn our salvation. But this does not mean that our actions do not matter. The heroes of faith have been highly regarded throughout the history of God’s people because they embodied a life of faith that is admirable. These people, even if imperfectly, put their trust in God despite their suffering and left a legacy worth imitating.



## Key Themes

**Faith Through Suffering:** As mentioned, *pistis* is the Greek word for faith. The author’s definition of faith in Hebrews is just one aspect of Biblical faith. The word *pistis* is rich in meaning when you put together all of what is taught about faith in Scripture. Hebrews defines faith as, “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1). This definition, in context, responds to a specific situation in the church. The original audience was facing persecution and imprisonment because of their commitment to Jesus. So, the author offers two key aspects of faith in response. The first is that faith is not limited to what we can see or know. Faith goes beyond what is seen to trust that God is still Lord of the unseen. The heroes in Hebrews 11 all lived in faith beyond the present moment and their immediate circumstances. God promised them that there would be a better life ahead. They chose faith in this promise above the feeble promises of the world. The second aspect of faith evaluates their circumstances to see how God is moving in their situation. Believers would not be wise to simply accept their circumstances for what they are at face value. We are encouraged to seek the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s presence in the joys and hardships of life as we trust that God is not absent.

Hebrews was written to a group of people facing persecution because of their proclamation of faith. This was a group of Jews who recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. But at the time, Christianity was not a recognized religion. So, Christians incurred social and political persecution for their beliefs. It was tempting for Jewish Christians to resort back to the law, rather than maintaining their proclamation in Christ. In fact, some believers followed the law to look like they were a Jew in public and practiced their faith in Jesus privately, no longer attending church gatherings. In Hebrews 6:1-6, the author says:

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God

and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

The author is imploring them to realize that to go back to the law would be to crucify Jesus over and over again. They were enlightened to the testimony of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Freed from righteousness by works. They have tasted and received the best gift of all. Why would they go back? Faith in Jesus despite suffering yields a greater hope than the law. In our context, faith in Jesus despite suffering yields a greater hope than anything the world offers us. So, even if we face persecution, who would we go back to a life separated from Christ?

**From Reason to Action:** When you look at the whole story of Scripture, we recognize other important facets of *pistis* that will be helpful to our discussions this semester. We often think of faith as something that is going on in our heads. But, through the stories we will look at this semester, we will see faith as something that people are *doing*. In these stories, faith is not merely mental (even the demons *believe* in Jesus, insofar as they do acknowledge who Jesus is), but an experience that occurs because of the choices you are making. We are not saying that our faith is defined by our works. Rather, we are saying that our faith is expressed and experienced through our works. Through this experience of faith, we get a taste of what we are hoping for. By enduring the suffering they are facing, the Jewish Christians are able to become one with Christ in his suffering (see Phil. 3:10) and recognize who our hope is in.

We also see this in James 2:18-19. James instructs us to not just have a mere passive belief that recognizes God's existence and simply mentally agrees with his word. We are also called to live out our faith. James reminds believers that even the demons believe there is a God. So, our faith is empty without action. We will see this exemplified in all of the heroes of faith we learn about this semester. In unison with James, the author of Hebrews is encouraging readers not just to know our hope but to live in light of that for which we hope. So faith, in its fullness, is something probably better translated as faithfulness (and this isn't only just a bad play on words). To be *faithful*, as we use that term, probably best captures the meaning of what the biblical authors mean by *pistis*. To maintain fidelity—and the marriage analogy is biblically apt—is to show faith: To say you love your spouse but not remain faithful to them raises serious questions about whether you do in fact love them. Jesus says as much in Matthew 7:21.

So the heresy to avoid here is **antinomianism**: This doctrine says that our behavior is irrelevant to our faith. If earning your salvation through works is one error (as the heretical Judaizers and against which much Scripture is written), this is the opposite error.

**Spiritual Heroes:** Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who would have known the Old Testament Scriptures very well and would have looked up to their ancient ancestors. The writer knew that using people they were already familiar with would encourage them to walk in their footsteps and endure hardship. It is important to keep in mind that these spiritual heroes were not perfect. When we look at this list, we may be tempted to think that God used extraordinary people who were capable of extraordinary things. This is a misconception. Rather, these heroes of faith were ordinary people who God graciously did extraordinary things through. "By faith"

each of these Biblical characters trusted that God was faith-worthy, exhibited God's strength through their actions, and earned a good reputation. They did this without the promise of the Messiah being fulfilled. But we have received that promised Messiah! If these heroes of faith persisted without receiving the fulfillment of God's promise, how lucky are we to be able to persist alongside a Savior!

Some people think that the Old Testament became irrelevant after Jesus' resurrection. But Hebrews 11 helps us see that this is not true! The whole story of Scripture is critical for understanding our faith for many reasons. To name a few, we learn about the faith displayed by God's people, recognize the sinfulness of the world, and realize our need for a Savior. The Old Testament Scriptures continually point to God's promise of a Savior. As we study the spiritual heroes this semester, we will receive the same encouragement the author had for the Jewish Christians. In the end, we will have the tools to act out our faith despite hardship and see how the story of Scripture has pointed to Jesus all along.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

**Spoiler Alert:** In the *Harry Potter* series, Professor Snape kills Dumbledore. After his death, we find out a lot about Dumbledore's life that is less than flattering. We find out that, in his younger years, Dumbledore was allied with Grindelwald who wanted to collect all of the Deathly Hallows and create a social order that gave wizards dominion over muggles. Yikes! That is not what we expected to find out about someone who we developed so much honor and esteem towards during the first six books/movies of the series! This knowledge set Harry into a whirlwind of confusion. Should he still trust everything Dumbledore had told him? Should he still follow in Dumbledore's footsteps in defeating Voldemort? (My apologies, He Who Must Not Be Named?)

The point is: even the great and wonderful Dumbledore isn't perfect. Jesus is the only person to have lived a perfect life. So, no one, besides him, we look up to will be without fault. This will be the same from the many stories we will come across this semester. God's people were not perfect. But He used them anyway! As we recognize the sinfulness of our own pasts or our current hardships, we are not disqualified from being a part of the greater story God has for the world.

\*\*\*

**Dante's Inferno:** In Dante's *Inferno* there's the (fictitious) story of Guido de Montefeltro, a friar who was promised forgiveness in advance by the Pope if he taught the Pope how to slander someone well for political gain (Guido had been an expert liar earlier in his life). Guido, feeling assured that now he could do whatever he wanted without it being a problem, so he obliged. In the story, when Guido died, Saint Francis comes to escort his soul to heaven. Here's how Dante describes it:

*Then Francis came, as soon as I was dead,  
for me; but one of the black cherubim [a demon]  
Told him: "Don't bear him off; do not cheat me.  
He must come down among my menials [to hell];  
the counsel that he gave was fraudulent...  
one can't absolve a man who's not repented,  
and no one can repent [of sin] and will [sin] at once;  
the law of contradiction won't allow it...Perhaps  
you did not think that I was a logician!"*

\*\*\*

*"Hebrews has now reached a plateau from which there is an excellent view of those who have gone on before. Looking at them, the readers can discover for themselves what is up ahead, what they will need to cope with it, and the fact that when they get there themselves there will be a great welcome."*

N. T. WRIGHT

## ! Three Main Points

1. Faith trusts God beyond our immediate circumstances and is willing to see God in the joys and hardships of life.
2. Faith is not just mental assent (even the demons do this); it also takes action.
3. Through reading the Old Testament this semester, we will hopefully be encouraged by the faith that has been exercised for a millenia and how the story of Scripture has been pointing toward the promise of Jesus.

## ? Discussion Questions

- How would you define faith? Accumulate a list of verses and passages that speak to this definition.
- How would you describe faith to someone who does not believe?
- Each spiritual hero listed in this passage exercised faith through their actions, not just their mental reasoning. Is that different from what you have conceived faith to be in the past? What does it look like to live out your faith?
- Does reading this list encourage you to trust God more? Why or why not?
- Do you have people in your life that have exemplified faith despite difficult circumstances? What stood out to you about them? How have they lived differently than someone who doesn't exercise faith?
- Who are your spiritual heroes? What about them makes you want to follow in their foot-steps?
- Look over the descriptions of the individuals in this list. Which one or ones stand out to

you? Why?

- In verses 32-40, the author gives a long list of individuals who faced horrible circumstances, like being stoned. If these individuals are examples of God's faithful people, why did he allow them to go through that? If you call yourself a faithful servant of God, what does this make you think or feel?
- The individuals listed in this passage were by no means perfect. What does this say about who God is able to use?
- These heroes did not live to see the fulfillment of God's promise in Jesus. Yet, they still had faith in God's Word and endured many challenges because of it. We have received God's promise in Jesus but continue to wait for the promise of full restoration in the New Heaven and the New Earth. What does it look like for us to live by faith in God's future promise for this world while the culture around us lives as if the present is all there will be? (If your group is confused on what the New Heaven and Earth is, refer them to the Bible Project video listed at the end of this curriculum)
- What do you learn about persecution, hardship, or suffering from this passage?
- Verse 38 says that these people of faith were too good for this world. Why is that? Is that true for us too?
- What is one way you can live by faith this week while trusting that God will give you strength to live in this way?

## Application and Practice

**Encouraging Letters.** Who are your spiritual heroes? Take some time this week to write a letter(s) to people who have exemplified obedient faith in your life. Encourage them by letting them know the reputation they have left and how they have impacted others to also live "By Faith".

**Read the Whole Story.** If one of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 stood out to you, find the Old Testament passage, and spend some time reading and reflecting on that individual. Why does their story intrigue you? How does their life challenge you to live differently?

## Going Deeper

**Sermon.** Tim Mackie, "What is Faith?"

**Video.** The Bible Project, "Heaven and Earth"

# GENESIS 4:1-16

Week 2: By Faith Moses



## Historical Context & Background

In terms of its position in Genesis, this is the first account of humanity after the fall, which occurred in Genesis 3. Once expelled from the garden Adam and Eve bear children, and we already see the effect of the fall upon humanity. The first story we're told is of brother killing brother. This comes right on the heels of God's promise that he would redeem the world through one of Eve's children. That promise should make us expect what immediately follows will reveal something about redemptive history. The story of Cain and Abel is situated in one of the most difficult sections of scripture, Genesis 1-11. These chapters are fraught with controversy in terms of its context, and questions about authorship and meaning can easily dominate a group—who wrote it, when, what genre it is, etc. These tend to be more distracting than helpful *for this discussion*, though these are important questions. This discussion teaches us about ourselves and about how Scripture works in harmony. Focus on that.



## Related Passages

1 John 3:11-15 - The Apostle John's characterization of Cain's murder of Abel.

Hebrews 11:4 - This verse discusses that Abel's offering proceeded from faith.

Ephesians 4:17-19 - The hardening of the heart and its effects.



## Key Terms

**Cain:** A name which means "treasure."

**Abel:** The name could mean "breath" or even something more negative like "empty."

**Commended or Attested:** In Greek these are cognates of the word martyr. In Hebrews 11:4 (and earlier in Hebrews 11:2) the word translated "commended" (NIV) or "attested" comes from the root word for martyr: "*Emartyrethe einai dikaios, martyrountos epi tois dorois auto you Theou*" ("He [Abel] was testified to be righteous, God testifying about his [Abel's] gifts"). Our testimony (*martyria*) could be a martyrdom.



## Key Themes

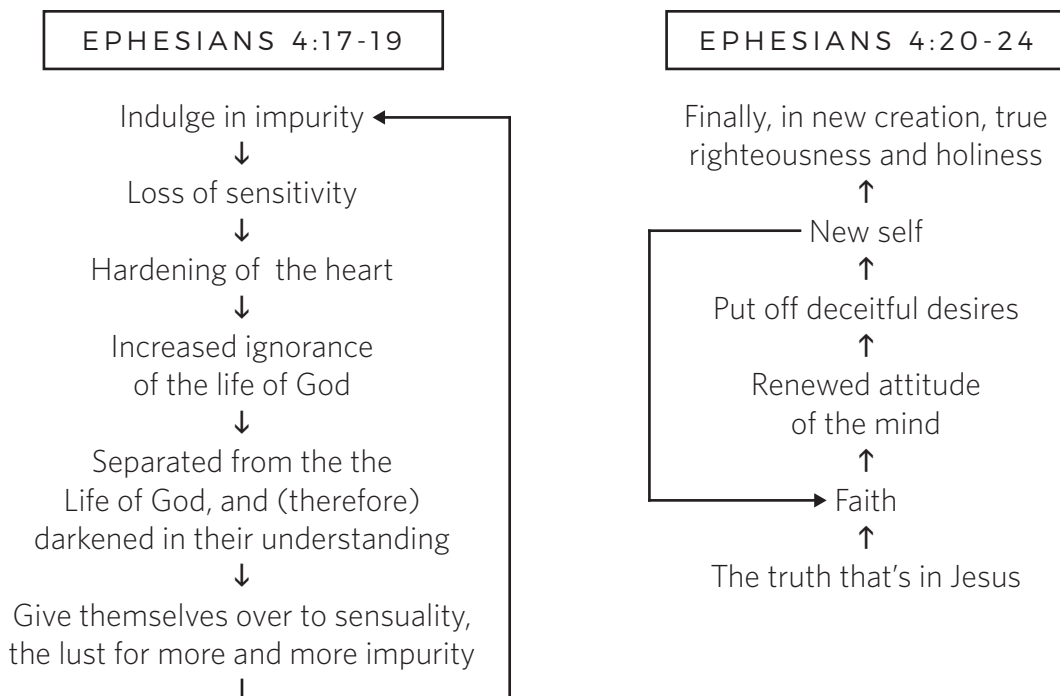
**Offering in Faith:** Hebrews 11 gives us insight into the most important thing about the offerings: faith. Strangely this aspect of the offering does not show up in the original Genesis account (and so this is a great example of how the New and Old Testaments interpret each other). Another interesting note: this passage does *not* contain a command to render offerings in the first place, so in some sense it's not as if Cain *disobeyed*, unless we assume something not provided for in the text. The key here is that Abel's sacrifice demonstrated faith. A mistake to avoid is to think that God somehow wanted or liked *the sacrifice* of Abel more than that of Cain—as if meat is preferred to vegetables. (The sacrificial system we associate with the Old Testament had not yet been established, and there's no evidence in the text the *kind* of sacrifice was what mattered.) Rather, the sacrifice reveals something about the sacrificer. The text bears this out, by saying that *Abel* is righteous, not his sacrifice was righteous. David attests to this in Psalm 51: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings." Jesus offers a similar piece of wisdom regarding human behavior: "By their fruit you will recognize them." In this case, the literal fruits—and any time you see something that connects both literally and figuratively, don't imagine you've merely hit upon coincidence!—revealed Cain as not having a heart that offered God his all, his best.

There can be many provocative lines of questioning on this front—the analysis of the offerings and their reception—none of which are settled by the text nor excluded (and so you're free to chase them in a way that brings the voice of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the faith to the fore):

- If it's about faith, was there something that Cain didn't **trust** God to do? Did he keep back some of his (best) store so that he could be safe? (See Matthew 6:19-21)
- Was there a measure of **greed** in Cain, that he decided not to give his best, the choicest fruits?
- Is it that Cain did not understand that our **possessions** aren't really ours, but God's? Did he think God's "portion" was only a part of his livelihood and life? (See 1 Chronicles 29:10-20)
- There's something **symbolic** about Abel offering blood, life, to God: Are we just giving God what we make but not our lives? As students this can be a particularly challenging question. We're tempted to give God some, but still go out and do what we want to do much of the time. We give him our grades, or our Sundays (or Thursdays), etc. But not our lives.

Finally when we tie the text of Hebrews with the text of Genesis we get a very important theological point: If Abel was declared righteous because of his offering, and his offering was satisfactory because it was offered in faith, we see that righteousness is tied to faith. So we have the New Testament's central tenet: Faith is what makes us righteous. This should not be *opposed* to works such that we eschew works in favor of faith (this is impossible, as James tells us in the 2nd chapter of his letter). Rather, Cain and Abel show us the true models in opposition: Cain offered a work which did not proceed by faith—and this was evident in his work—and Abel offered a work which did proceed by faith (note that nobody showed faith while withholding an offering, and so James' teaching is made manifest in Abel).

**The Important Part of the Story:** In the actual Genesis account perhaps the crux of the story arrives in verses 6-7. God tells Cain he *can* do what is right; he can master the sin at the door. But Cain's response is to harden his heart (he actually does this twice, and instead of repenting for the murder worries about saving his own skin). We see this theme occur throughout scripture as well—the hardening of the heart upon the invitation from God to obey, reform, and soften. Pharaoh hardened his heart; Israelite leaders and kings hardened their hearts; Israel corporately is hardened at points in the Old Testament and is hardened in the New Testament (Romans 11:7). In this sense we can look at Cain and Abel as also being two impulses in ourselves—the impulse to respond to rebuke with anger, hardening, and hatred. We see this impulse collectively on display in Jesus' time: When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees they murdered him, their God. Yet we also have the choice to reform. How? Imitation. Hebrews 6:12 tells us this is the way, as does Paul's letter to the Ephesians, ending in his exhortation to "be imitators of God" (5:1). Building to that, Ephesians 4 talks about the relation of sin and hardening of the heart, contrasting it with the process of renewal that comes through Jesus. Here's a chart which outlines those two paths, based off the Ephesians text:



Imitation is the choice Cain should have made regarding Abel. But if we harden rather than imitate, we come to hate things which remind us of our offense. To be hardened is to hate that which does you no wrong because it reminds you of your wrong. What had Abel done *to Cain* to make Cain murder him? Nothing. He was faithful. Yet Abel's faithfulness was a visible challenge to Cain, a reminder that Cain refused to reform. Cain had to destroy that reminder, but he didn't find peace. These are the ideas the Apostle John picks up on in his first letter. He says this, "For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:11-12). John



tells us not to be like this. A hardening anger at our neighbor is murder, and this is not of Christ. John says two verses later, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him” (1 John 3:14-15).

The Genesis passage also challenges us to be like Abel (and Christ). To live faithfully knowing that our faithful witness will be a necessary challenge to a hardened world, even a deadly challenge. We must ask ourselves if we’re also willing to bear this testimony (*martyria*, see terms), to court martyrdom because we live faithfully. Nestled between the two quotes above, John says this: “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13).

**Salvation and Savior Shown:** One of the major emphases of this study is to see how the Old Testament points to Christ, and how it contains wisdom for us as *the Church*. It cannot be overemphasized that severing the necessary connections between Christ and the story of Israel makes the Old Testament unnecessary to understanding Christ; makes it uninteresting to read as a Christian; or reduces the Old Testament to a series of morality stories that doesn’t get us beyond Sunday School lessons. The Old Testament is always the signpost to Christ, *showing us* through figures and types truths about him, his church, and us. And this is *the Biblical* way to read it: See how Paul reads the story of Hagar and Sarah not just as a morality tale, but as a sign of the old and new covenants (Galatians 4). Read how Jesus (in Matthew 24) compares the salvation of his people to Noah—and so the Ark is the Church (the body of Christ) which saves us from destruction and prepares us for a remade earth. Let’s try to read this story the same way. Here are some thoughts.

- Eve was promised a son who would save humanity (see the “*protoevangelion*” of Genesis 3:15). It’s interesting she names her firstborn “Cain,” which means treasure, and her second-born “Abel,” which could mean “breath” or even something more negative, like “empty.” Like the story of Jacob and Esau, it’s not the first son, the expected son, who fulfills the promise. God’s choice of means and purposes in the outworking of salvation history frustrate our expectations. He works it out in his way, not ours (see Romans 9). Cain is not the promised one, but the slayer. Even Abel is not the promised one because he remains slain. Both point forward.
- Abel should remind us of other Biblical younger-brothers: Isaac, Esau, Joseph. King David, was also a younger-brother shepherd, adding a parallel layer. Through David this trajectory only points one place: Jesus. And so Abel is ultimately a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. And Jesus is also a second-born, as the next point shows.
- Meditating on Cain leads us similarly to Jesus. The association of Cain with Adam should be obvious—his sin, his hiding what he’s done, his curse, and exile. Paul treats Jesus as the second Adam (Romans 5), so there’s a kind of grand firstborn/second Son association between Adam and Christ. For Paul, the firstborn (Adam) fails and the second (Jesus) succeeds. And it’s the first Adam (sinful man, which Adam exemplifies) who slays the second Adam (Christ).
- Yet, the New Testament calls Christ the firstborn many times—the firstborn of the dead; the firstborn over all creation; the firstborn among brethren; etc.—but this doesn’t contradict the above point because this Genesis 4 story actually has two firstborns: Cain and the

sacrificial lamb. Jesus is the firstborn lamb.

- We see other firstborns trying to kill younger-sons in other parts of Scripture: Jacob tries to kill Esau; Joseph's brothers try to kill him, etc. (though this is not a *rule* but a trend). All of these stories are also types for the gospel story.
- Considered differently, we see hints of Cain and Abel as types for corporate Israel and the Church: In this case, the firstborn (Cain/Israel) slay the second (Abel/Christ and his church) because of the perfect sacrifice offered by the latter—the crucifixion, where the blood of firstborn, the lamb, was shed. In both stories, the righteous one is slain by the unrighteous.
- Some have also seen Cain and Abel as representing the ongoing battle of the City of Man and the City of God: For them this Genesis story points to the blood of the martyrs, whose possession of the perfect offering (Christ) brings death at the hands of their unrighteous brothers, the world.
- Another goal here is to make the connections and see how Christ adds *depth* to the message: e.g. in Christ, not only was the righteous one slain by the unrighteous—as in Abel's case—but *for* the unrighteous; not only did he offer a firstborn lamb's blood, he offered *his* blood because he is the Lamb of God. And again, this is the Scriptural way to read: Hebrews 12:24 makes just this kind of Christological connection.

The point of this exercise is not necessarily to get a perfect one-to-one match of every detail of this story and Jesus' life, or to treat any of what I outlined above as the single meaning of the text. The idea is to get them looking for Christ and the gospel in this text. If this ends up being a kind of puzzle for them to work out, great! Diving further into the text is good. The early church read texts like this as a way to see the cohesion of the Old and New Testaments, to *meditate* on the story of salvation history which reaches its fulfillment in Christ, and to see how the Holy Spirit brings truths from below the surface of the text to speak deeper truths. We can try to read like them. **Teaching tip:** Use a chart or some visual paper to make these connections. Don't feel that you need to limit the creativity of connections; more connections could be made than what I put above. **The limiting principle here is whether these meditations and connections lead us deeper into the mystery of Christ and salvation, in which case they would be meaningfully true connections; or whether they lead into doctrinal or moral error, upon which we would have false connections.**

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

**Cain:** Lord Byron wrote an 1821 play titled *Cain*, in which he imagines a dramatized story of Cain's descent into murderous hatred:

[www.gutenberg.org/files/23475/23475-h/23475-h.htm#Page\\_213](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23475/23475-h/23475-h.htm#Page_213)

**East of Eden:** Read John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, if you know what's good for you.



## Three Main Points

1. Hebrews makes faith the important element regarding Abel's righteousness, not necessarily the offering.
2. The key moment for Cain was not his offering or his murdering, but his response to God's offer to try again. He refused.
3. This story has symbolic significance, in that it points us toward elements of the gospel. Jesus is all over this story, and this story inaugurates a great many themes which recur in the Bible.



## Discussion Questions

- **See the questions under the first theme.**
- What are some ideas, images, or details from the story of Cain and Abel that you see show up repeatedly in Scripture? How do we see these symbols show up in the life of Christ?
- In what way is Abel an image of Christ?
- What about Abel's sacrifice showed greater *faith* (as we know from Hebrews 11:4)?
- What is the relationship between faith and action in the Cain and Abel story, and how do we figure out what that means for us?
- What does it show about Cain that he was unwilling to admit he was wrong and change? Where do we choose to dive deeper into darkness rather than admit we're wrong?
- Why did Cain *kill* Abel? What did Abel have to do with Cain's sacrifice at all? What *should* have been Cain's attitude *toward* Abel? (Answer: The desire to *imitate*.)
- Augustine once said, "This is a sin which God particularly rebukes, namely, sulkiness about another's goodness, and a brother's goodness at that." Where do we sulk in jealousy at others' goodness and success? How do we "murder" them (1 John 3:15) in our own way?
- Who are some people around you that you think are worthy of imitation? Are there people around you who you find yourself angry with just because they (seem to) live faithfully?
- Why do you think God didn't kill Cain?
- Who was Cain angry at, that he chose to kill Abel—himself, Abel, God? Why do you think that?
- What is God's punishment for Cain? How does that relate to his offering and what he was doing before his offering? What might that tell us about our own offerings with our labor?
- Many early manuscripts of Genesis leave out the phrase "Let's go out to the field" in verse 8 of chapter 4, so that it reads, "Now, Cain spoke to his brother Abel. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." What do you think Cain might have said to his brother? Even including the phrase in most translations, what do you think that walk to the field was like for the brothers?
- What offering do you make?
  - Do you tithe?
  - Do you make an offering of your time?
  - Why did you choose the major you did?
  - What specifically are you holding back from offering to God?

- Is our relationship to God based on our behavior? Can we focus on what we're offering to God without that turning into something by which we *earn* God's favor?

## Application and Practice

**Offering:** Find something that is your "best" and donate it. If it's a painful offering, so much the better, but offer that pain to God! Report back.

**Reading Scripture:** Find another story you're familiar with from the Old Testament and read it with the typological lens. What insights do you find about Christ?

**Imitation:** Find someone you think exemplifies an aspect of the Christian life you want to adopt. Ask them about their routines and habits related to this, or observe them and try to imitate relevant aspects of their lives which contribute to that virtue.

## Going Deeper

**Video:** John Piper explains Cain and Abel, in expositing 1 John 3:11-15.

**Video:** The Bible Project, "Overview: Genesis 1-11"

# GENESIS 18:1-15

## Week 3: By Faith Sarah



### Historical Context & Background

Sarah's story stretches across various chapters in Genesis. We will camp out in Genesis 18:1-15, but be ready to flip to nearby chapters so we can understand Sarah's full story. Last week we talked about the story of Cain and Abel, the first glimpse of humanity after the Fall. Between then and this week's passage, God is heartbroken over the depravity of humanity and floods the earth so as to protect any goodness left. Noah, because of his faithfulness, and his family are protected from destruction (Genesis 6-9). But, Noah was not perfect and his iniquities led to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Which, if you know the story, was a doing of human pride that leads to chaos (the scattering of humanity). Out of these scattered people, a line is traced to Abram and his wife, Sarah, in Genesis 12. As we flip between different passages, you might notice that Sarah and Abraham are sometimes called Sarai and Abram. In Genesis 17, God made a covenant with Abram:

<sup>4</sup>As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.

As a mark of this covenantal relationship, God changes their names from Sarai and Abram to Sarah (meaning, *noblewoman* or *princess*) and Abraham (meaning, *father of many*). Genesis follows the histories of God and Abraham's family who were promised in the Genesis 17 covenant.



### Related Passages

Galatians 4:21-31 – Paul rereads the story of Sarah and Hagar (through whom Abraham begat Ishmael, his first son) symbolize two distinct ways of relating to God. Paul implores believers to be sons and daughters of a free woman, Sarah. If we live as a child of the slave woman, we are enslaved by the law. By living as a child of Sarah, who received God's promise, we embrace freedom in Christ.

Luke 1:36 – Paralleling Sarah's conception, Elizabeth is promised a son in her old age. As God's promised Savior came through the lineage of Sarah's son, Elizabeth's son echoed this promise.



## Key Terms

**The Three Visitors:** Genesis 18 depicts the final occasion of God appearing to Abraham. This time, there are three visitors. Abraham greets his guests using the Hebrew word *adonai*, which means “Lord”. The Hebrew text only uses this word if *Yahweh*, or “God”, is present. Without having met her, they know Sarah’s name and situation. With these clues, we know the visitors are from God. Although their identity is debated (Are they angels? The Angel of the Lord?), what is important to focus on for this study is the message they deliver.

**Isaac:** In Hebrew, the name Isaac means, “one who laughs”. In Genesis 18, Sarah doubtfully laughs that God would allow her to conceive. Isaac’s name serves as a parallel to the laughter Sarah experiences when her son is born one year later. In honor of the joyful laughter God brings to her and Abraham, they name their son Isaac.



## Key Themes

**Patient Obedience:** If you grew up going to Sunday School, you may know Abraham as Father Abraham who had many sons—and how many sons had Father Abraham. If you know the song, you may be rolling your eyes from having to sing along all those years ago in Sunday School. And it may still get stuck in your head. It’s a catchy and joyful proclamation about God making a nation through two faithful people. But, what we sing about in the song was not easy for Abraham and Sarah. Despite God’s promise to make Abraham the father of all nations, they struggled to trust God. But we will see in this passage that Sarah, by faith, waited in obedience for God to fulfill His promise.

At first, Sarah struggled to be obedient to God’s promise given in Genesis 12. If you turn to Genesis 16, things get a little crazy. Sarah knew God promised her and Abraham would have descendants who would inherit the land they inhabited. But, she hadn’t borne any children. Despite knowing God’s promised outcome, Sarah tried to make it come about in her own way. She brought her servant, Hagar, to Abraham and said, “The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her” (Genesis 16:2). What!? Sarah was so desperate for the promise God had given that she tried to make it happen on her own. Sarah’s plan, in a way, worked as Hagar gave birth to a son named Ishmael. But Sarah’s plan brought much hardship. Sarah and Hagar’s relationship became strained. Eventually, Hagar runs away because of Sarah’s harshness towards her. She was jealous Hagar was able to provide Abraham the child Sarah never could. This all occurred because Sarah went outside of God’s will to make His will happen. But this was not God’s plan for Sarah. He had a better one. And despite her lack of trust, God still fulfilled His own plan for her.

What do we learn from this? Have you ever gotten impatient with God and tried to make something happen on your own terms? Instead of having faith in God’s promise, Sarah took matters into her own hands—and it only led to more hardship. Sarah questioned whether God’s promise was for her and tried to give the promise to Hagar. Faith does not only look like doing

something in response to God's calling. Sometimes, God asks us to wait. And to wait patiently. And occasionally, like Sarah, He asks us to wait a long time. Or, at least, longer than we want. God's better plan for Sarah came within His timing, not hers. When we act in faith, sometimes this action is sitting still and trusting. At first, Sarah struggled to wait on the Lord's timing. But after overcoming her doubt (which we will talk about next!), Sarah waited. God did not take away His promise because of Sarah's lack of faith. He promised it again! In Genesis 17:16, God specifies that Sarah *will* be a part of God's covenantal promise with Abraham. She will be the mother of many nations. In Genesis 21:1-7, Sarah gives birth to her son. And it was a joyous occasion! God's plan brought joy and laughter while Sarah's plan brought contempt and hardship. It's clear who had the better blueprint for Sarah's life.

**Disappointment:** We've mentioned God's promise to make Abraham into a great nation. Sarah took this promise seriously. She understood childbearing to be a significant part of her vocation. Indeed motherhood—whether physical or spiritual—is the primary vocation for all women, just as paternity—spiritual or physical—is the primary vocation for all men. But Sarah's maternal vocation included a promise that her physical descendants would fulfill a spiritual mission. So Sarah's apparent infertility ran afoul of the promises God gave her and her husband Abraham.

Sarah was humiliated by her infertility. Sarah was discouraged that she would never be a mother. For so long, she suffered through the disappointment of not bearing any children. She believed she was a failure. After years of childlessness, it was hard to believe she would bear a child at such an old age. Knowing this, we can understand why she reacted in disbelieving laughter in verse 12. But, that does not mean Sarah should have felt this way. God proved His faithfulness before and He wanted her to trust him. In her laughter, Sarah even questions the promise, "How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?" (Genesis 18:14). Sarah is guarding herself against more disappointment. Laughing at the possibility of having a child guards her from more pain.

We do this, too. Have you ever put walls up to protect yourself from disappointment? Do you find it easier to not have hope? If we don't have hope, we won't be let down—right? This is what Sarah was dealing with. More than wanting to trust God, she wanted to not face disappointment—yet again. Resisting hope leads to apathy. But God does not call us to lead an apathetic life, for "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). It is okay to be disappointed. Hardship is a part of life. But, Scripture reminds us over and over again: "Do not be discouraged" (Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 41:10, Deuteronomy 31:6, 2 Chronicles 20:15, plus many more). Disappointment with our circumstances is normal. But hardship should not take away what our hope is in. Jesus gave us the greatest hope of all! Sarah became discouraged because she put her hope in bearing a child. Instead, her hope should have been in God's faithfulness. God has proven to be faithful. So, our hope should be in Him, not our worldly circumstances.

**Greater Blessings:** In Genesis 18:13, the visitor asks, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah did not believe God could do what seemed impossible. But, God created all things. So why is it hard for us to believe that nothing is too difficult for the Lord? We too will put human limitations on God. Sarah knew the normal cycle of human life. If she was unable to conceive when she was young, how was she to conceive at an old age? Blocked by her defense mechanisms,

Sarah was numb to who God was. With the limitations of our human minds, it can be easy to forget who God is. We may think, “My past is too dirty for God to make clean,” or, “My hardships are too trivial for God to care.” But, this is simply not true.

Confronted by her mistrust of the Lord, Sarah denies she ever laughed. She was ashamed by the exposure of her doubt. But God blessed her anyway. Sarah was still promised a son. Funny enough, when her son was born, Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6). She laughed! But this time, laughter came because God’s fulfilled promise—not because Sarah doubted. Isaac was the fulfillment of God’s promise to the father and mother of all the nations. What is more, through Isaac, God fulfilled an even greater promise. Jesus was born through the line of Isaac! By faith, Sarah received a greater blessing than she could have ever conceived. Through Sarah’s still obedience, God made a way for all. And we get to share in the greater blessing that came! To fulfill His ultimate promise of making a way to Himself, God came Himself in the flesh to conquer sin and death. Jesus rose from the dead, the biggest and greatest miracle of them all. In light of this, it seems silly to believe God can forgive us or intervene in our disappointments.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

**Vincent Van Gogh:** Even if you don’t care for art, you have heard of Vincent Van Gogh. If you don’t know his name, then you’ve definitely seen his most famous painting, *The Starry Night*. Today, everyone knows who is. He is one of the most renowned artists of all time. But, Van Gogh’s fame began at his untimely death. He never experienced the fruit of his labor. Only ever selling one of his paintings, Van Gogh lived in poverty. He was not recognized as an artist by his contemporaries. Rather, he was known as a failure. Van Gogh’s life was defined by hardship, poverty, and disappointment. But, his failures later revolutionized Western art. He never conceived the impact his art made on the world. Similarly, Sarah did not know God would use her faithfulness to pave the way for a Savior. Long after her lifetime, Sarah’s obedience helped to transform the world.

## ! Three Main Points

1. Sometimes, faithfulness looks like waiting patiently on the Lord’s timing.
2. If we let it, disappointment can cloud our judgement and distract us from our hope in Jesus.
3. It can be tempting to place human limitations on God. But, Sarah’s faithfulness to God brought a blessing greater than she could have imagined.

## ? Discussion Questions

- Why does Sarah laugh when she hears that she will bear a child? Why does the visitor call her out for her laughter? Should she have laughed?



- One of the visitors called Sarah by name and knew about her infertility. Who is this visitor? Why did he know so much about Sarah?
- Sarah reacted in mistrust because of her long-suffering disappointments. Are there disappointments in your life that keep you from trusting God? What are they?
- How have you responded to disappointment in the past? What was good or bad about that past response? How can you respond differently?
- Is there a difference between disappointment and discouragement? What is it? What do other verses or passages say about being discouraged?
- How do we know if God is calling us to sit still or to move forward?
- Is it hard for you to wait on God? Why or why not? How can we get better at waiting?
- How is faith and patience related?
- What does it mean or look like to have our hope in worldly circumstances? What does it look like to, instead, put our hope in Jesus?
- Can you think of a time in your life when you tried to force something to happen in your life instead of waiting on the Lord's timing?
- Do you trust God's will for your life above your own will?
- By not believing God could give her a child at her old age, Sarah was putting human limitations on God. Do you put constraints on God? Should you? What are they?
- Is there anything you are neglecting to bring before the Lord because you are afraid His response will disappoint you? What is it?
- In what ways does Sarah's life teach us more about living faithfully? What do we learn about God's faithfulness?
- In what ways does this story influence or point to the coming Savior?
- why do you think Sarah was included in the 'Hall of Faith' (Hebrews 11)?

## Application & Practice

**Sit Still.** For 30 minutes this week, sit still before the Lord. Ask Him, "Where are you asking me to wait? Is there anything I am restless about and trying to make happen on my own accord?" As you wait before Him, take note of any restless thoughts distracting you during this time. What distracts us from the Lord is often what we have our hope in.

**Gratitude.** Disappointment is a reality of life. We have expectations for our grades, careers, relationships, families, etc., but they don't always go our way. If we get too caught up in what isn't or hasn't gone 'right', we can become apathetic, angry, or depressed. If you find yourself prone to these feelings, commit to a gratitude journal this week. List out all your gratitudes and lift them up to God, thanking Him for all the good in your life.

## Going Deeper

**Interview:** N.T. Wright, "When It Appears God Isn't at Work"

**Article:** "Abraham's Family Tree Chart"

**Video.** The Bible Project, "Overview: Genesis 12-50"

# GENESIS 22:1-10

## Week 4: By Faith Abraham



### Historical Context & Background

Abraham's story begins in the land called Ur where he was raised by his father, Terah. God calls Abraham to leave this familiar country and go to an unknown land. Abraham is promised that he will be made into a great nation and blessed (Genesis 12). As Abraham's story continues throughout Genesis, we see the ups and downs of his relationship with the Lord. Last week, we talked about the miracle of Sarah conceiving a child at an old age. Because of her faithfulness to God's promise, Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac. Abraham and Sarah believed Isaac was the boy out of whom God would build a great nation. Then, the unexpected happened. God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son, something God himself will later have to do.



### Related Passages

John 1:29 - Jesus is the true sacrificial lamb that will take away the sins of the world.  
John 3:16 - God will sacrifice His only son so, through Him, the world would be saved.  
Romans 4 - Paul discusses the relation of Abraham's faith to his righteousness.



### Key Terms

**Shachah:** This Hebrew word of worship means "to bow down", or "to lay prostrate with face touching the ground." Abraham and Isaac were going to the mountain to humbly worship God. This is the first time the word worship is used in the Bible with reference to God.

**"We will come back to you":** Abraham had full confidence in God. Even though God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham trusted. He had faith that God had the power to resurrect Isaac and fulfill His promise.

**Jehovah Jireh:** This proclamation means, "the Lord will provide." Abraham named this mount in honor of what God did.



### Key Themes

**By Faith:** As you may remember, Hebrews 11 defines faith as "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Abraham embodies this definition of faith. In Gen-

esis 12, God asks him to leave his country and go to an unknown land. God says that he will show Abraham this land and promises that he will make him into a great nation. Rather than questioning God, Abraham trusted. By faith, Abraham packed up his whole life and moved to an unknown place based on this promise from God. Although he had no idea where the Lord was leading him, Abraham went. The removal of familiar surroundings required Abraham to have total dependence on God. Abraham left what was comfortable and familiar to serve the Lord. God still asks us to do the same. We are asked to be faithful to God even when it is difficult or requires us to leave behind what is familiar or easy.

In some ways, the journey to college parallels Abraham's journey. Most of us move out of our homes—away from what is familiar—and to an unknown land. There may not be a special calling from God to attend the University of Kentucky, but we are all called to be faithful as we transition into new territory. We are given the opportunity to place our full trust in the Lord and depend on Him to provide all that we need.

***Trust then Obey:*** God asks Abraham to be faithful and trust where God is leading him. Abraham has the opportunity to either obey God's call or to run away. Abraham heeds to God's call by leaving his land. He obeys God's command to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. In both situations, God is asking Abraham to obey so that He can lead him into something greater. We may not always be able to understand why God is asking us to do something. Especially when it means giving up comfort or something we love. But, the Lord's thoughts and ways are higher than our own (Isaiah 55:8-9). If we trust him, God may call us to do things that we can't see the rationale for. With trust, however, we can obey in the confidence that God is good and faithful. The challenge is: will we trust God's ways more than our own? And, if we fail to obey, do we really trust God after all?

One difficulty with trust and obedience is discerning what God is calling us to do. Many people have been confident that they've heard God's voice telling them to do something wild and crazy—and the wilder and crazier, the reasoning goes, the more likely it is God. However, it's important to recognize that Abraham's story is an exception, not the rule. God rarely calls us to do something that bucks against our moral impulses and intuitions (especially when those are shaped by God's spirit that dwells within us). So, if you think you hear God telling you to do something that sounds odd or out of left field, it's wise to cross check that calling with Scripture and community. Seek out God's word and ask if what God is calling you to is with or against Scripture and ask Godly people near you whether you are hearing God's voice. This does not at all mean our trust or obedience is conditional on what others say, but it means we must have the humility to admit we are not infallible interpreters of what is, or is not, God's voice. Listening to God is not just an individual task.

NOTA BENE: As a leader you should never entertain with students the idea that God could (much less would) call them to do something immoral or evil. Abraham's story is not showing this. This would be like reading Joshua and thinking the point is to justify genocide by some Divine Command Theory of ethics. The merely literal level—the level at which we consider the story only in itself with no deeper Christological reference—is *not* the primary point of the stories! The primary thing this story does is point to Jesus (see the 3rd theme). That's its function

in Scripture. But even if this story were only considered by itself on the literal level (and again, it shouldn't be), Abraham's story *does not* show God commanding evil. Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham did *not* think God commanded him to murder his son; he believed Isaac would not stay dead. So firmly reject any idea that because God told Abraham to commit murder he can tell me to sleep with my boyfriend.

**The Test:** Recall that God's initial promise to Abraham included that Abraham would be the father of many nations. So, when Abraham's wife Sarah miraculously conceived and Isaac was born, Abraham was certain that Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise. Which makes what happened next all the more perplexing. God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, to God. Of course, Abraham technically had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but Ishmael was separated from Abraham's family. So, Isaac, in Abraham's eyes, must have been the fulfillment of God's promise. Why would God ask this of him?

On the third day after he was asked to sacrifice his son, Abraham and Isaac set out to go to the place where the sacrifice would happen. At some point, it must have occurred to Isaac what was happening. The text gives no indication that Isaac tries to flee. Perhaps Isaac is modeling what would later be modeled by Christ: a willing submission to a necessary sacrifice. Just as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into Isaac, God called out to him and said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy." Abraham passed the test. Sparing Isaac, the Lord provided a ram as the sacrifice.

This story gives us a glimpse at the coming story of Jesus in the gospels. We see the love of a father displayed in both stories as they are faced with the challenge of letting their sons be a sacrifice. God loved the whole world so much that He gave His one and only Son so that we may be reconciled again. Just as Abraham knew that God could (and would) resurrect Isaac, God knew that Jesus had to die and resurrect in order to defeat death..

Sacrifice of Isaac	Sacrifice of Jesus
Sacrifice to take away sins	Sacrifice to take away sins
Abraham's only son	God the Father's only Son
Rides a donkey to the mountain of sacrifice	Rides donkey into Jerusalem to die (Palm Sunday)
Isaac carries wood to the top of mountain	Jesus carries cross of wood to top of mountain
Sacrificed ram caught in thorns	Jesus crowned with thorns as He is crucified
Agrees to be sacrificed, does not resist	Agrees to be sacrificed, does not resist
Mt. Moriah outside city of Salem	Mt. Calvary (hills of Moriah) outside Jerusalem ("Jira"-Salem)
God will provide the lamb	Jesus is the "lamb of God"

## ☞ Quotes & Illustrations

**The Chosen One:** In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, we learn of a prophecy. This prophecy reveals that neither Harry nor the Dark Lord can live while the other survives. One of them must die. And the one who dies must die by the hand of the other. So, the only way evil can be defeated is if Harry himself kills the Dark Lord. From this point, the ending of the series is clear. Harry will kill Voldemort. But, we are hit with a turn in the final scenes of the series. When the Dark Lord tried to kill Harry as a child, a part of Voldemort's soul split off and attached itself to Harry. Voldemort cannot die if Harry lives. So, Harry must die. We are all shocked as Harry walks down to the Forbidden Forest to face his fate. This is not what the prophecy said! But, knowing he must die to save the world, Harry sacrificed himself to the Dark Lord. What Harry did not know about was the protective magic he carried in his blood (this is a long story) that prevented Voldemort from killing him. So, the piece of Voldemort's soul was destroyed but Harry lived to fulfill the prophecy. Harry, as expected, kills Voldemort and the evil regime collapses. Similar to Harry, Abraham was given a promise, and this promise seemed to be threatened by God's request. By faith Abraham remained obedient to God and was willing to give up his promise for the sake of something greater. In the end, a new way was provided and God fulfilled His covenant with Abraham.

**Law & Order:** An episode of *Law & Order* titled "Under God" (S13 E12) has a priest murder a drug dealer and defends himself by claiming God told him to do it. I won't spoil how it turns out, but it's something which mines the moral and theological intuitions as it's watched.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

JOHN THE BAPTIST

## ! Three Main Points

1. God is faithful and true to His promises.
2. The Lord provides, even if in mysterious ways.
3. Sacrifice is required to atone for sin, but only Jesus was the perfect sacrifice made to cover all sins.

## ? Discussion Questions

- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about humans?
- What does this passage teach us about how we are supposed to respond to God?
- How has God called you to be faithful to Him?
- Do you think God can command you to do something evil? How does that square with this story? How do we avoid using this story to justify our own evil?

- What do you cherish most? Would you be willing to give it up for God?
- Our culture tells us that you can only rely on yourself and that we should strive to be self-sufficient. What are ways that we can choose to live counter culturally and obey God?
- When you have disobeyed God, what did that feel like? Did you end up obeying God in the end?
- How was your move to college similar to Abraham's move from Harran? How was it different?
- What is the role of trust in the story? How is trust different from obedience?
- Why is it important to obey God?
- Last week we talked about Isaac's miraculous birth which brought uncontainable joy to his parents. How is that significant to this week's passage?
- How do you see the gospel narrative woven throughout the story of Abraham and Isaac?
- Why did God not require Abraham to sacrifice his son?
- Why did God test Abraham?
- Last week we talked about Sarah, who was given an outcome but had to wait obediently. This week we see Abraham responding obediently to God's call but not knowing the outcome. Which do you find more difficult? Why?

## Application & Practice

**Reflect:** Take some time this week to reflect on what the Lord has called, or is calling you to do in your life. Is there something specific that you believe God is calling you to do? Discuss that in your group and talk about how to discern whether or not that calling is from God.

## Going Deeper

**Video.** *The Bible Project, "The Test"*

**Article.** *The Bible Project, "Why did God Ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?"*

**Article.** *"Timeline of Abram (Abraham)"*

# GENESIS 39

## Week 5: In Faith Joseph



### Historical Context & Background

Joseph is the son of Jacob, grandson of Isaac, and great-grandson of Abraham. He is the youngest of twelve siblings—tough! While we will focus on Genesis 39, the story of Joseph begins in Genesis 37. The story begins with his father, Jacob, showing favoritism toward him which makes his brothers jealous. On top of that, Joseph has a dream where all his family is bowing down to him—making the situation worse. This heightens his brothers hatred toward him and leads to them faking Joseph’s death and selling him into slavery. This is where we pick up.



### Related Passages

1 Corinthians 10:13 – This passage addresses temptation and how God intervenes in the midst of it.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 – This passage asks us to flee from sexual immorality and reveals the destruction of sexual sin for both body and soul.



### Key Terms

**Barak:** Is the Hebrew word for “blessed.” It can also mean “to kneel” or “to bless God” as an act of adoration.

**Saleah:** Hebrew for “To make prosperous.”



### Key Themes

**Fleeing Sexual Temptation:** We see through this story, Joseph has a choice. He can indulge in sexual temptation or flee from it. We see that he chooses to flee, but not without some ramifications. He loses a position of power in Potiphar’s household. His freedom is stripped as he is unrightfully placed in prison. We may find ourselves in similar situations (just, not in prison... hopefully!). For example, our sexual sin (and this means more than just having sex with someone who’s not your spouse) could bring us to a crossroads. Will we stay faithful or be lured further into it? Joseph is an example for us. We each face our own Potiphar moments, tempted towards a short-term pleasure even though we know it’s wrong. On the college campus, sexual

sin is especially prevalent, so Joseph's story of fleeing sexual temptation is especially relatable.

Conversations about sexual sin aren't easy or fun in groups, but they're important. It seems that throughout history, even in the Church (especially as revealed recently across denominations), sexual sin has been a particular stumbling block. So sexual sin is perhaps uniquely powerful. But in our day sexuality has gained an even more prominent place in our culture as the heart of our identity (a great book by Carl Trueman called *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* detailing how we got here). We must see sex and sexuality as one of the planes on which we contend for our identity. So talking about it is important. It's no accident that we call sexual sin against the beloved "unfaithfulness." In the giving of ourselves we demonstrate what we cling to and with whom we keep faith. By exercising chastity—the Christian sexual virtue—we show we're keeping faith with God, treating our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit (Paul uses the idea of faithfulness to God in his discussion of sexual sin in 1 Cor. 6). It might be overstating it to say that Joseph's *identity* was at stake when Potipher's wife came to him naked (this would be a somewhat anachronistic analysis); but it might *not* be overstating it to say that's what's at stake for our students when a computer screen or boyfriend similarly pressures them in the same way.

**The Lord's Favor:** We see throughout this passage that the Lord gave Joseph success, but success may not always conform to our expectations. Joseph was sold into slavery when he was seventeen and wasn't released until he was thirty—and he spent some time in prison during that time. So, while we see God's favor in this passage, it's worth pointing out that Joseph may not have *felt* very blessed during those thirteen years. God did bless Joseph, but in God's own timing—it may not be the way Joseph would have drawn it up. True faithfulness is being obedient to God's calling even if we don't see the fruit of it in the short term. By faith Joseph trusted God more than his circumstances and stayed faithful to the Lord despite his situation. And the Lord blessed him. We see similar situations throughout Scripture. The Lord told David that he would become king of Israel, but even after he was anointed he didn't become King for another fifteen years.

The Bible and the history of the Church is filled with people who have the favor of God but don't experience the emotions that we expect to come along with it. But these are the moments when we're most faithful. C. S. Lewis, in Letter 8 of his fictional work *The Screwtape Letters*, imagined one demon saying this to another: "Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's [God's] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys." Joseph denied sexual temptation and was jailed. However, his faithfulness and the pit he was thrown into because of it allowed an opportunity for him to gain power in Egypt, and, long story short, provide resources and food for his family in the midst of a famine. Because Joseph turned down wrongful momentary pleasures, he was rewarded and used by God in the long run. So often we walk into sexual sin because we are so encaptured by the momentary pleasures that we become blinded to what God has in store for us. From the story of Joseph, we see the value of an eternal mindset over a momentary mindset, even when the rewards for his faithfulness weren't what he expected when he expected them.



**How this points to Jesus:** The story of Joseph is sometimes described as the gospel through the lens of Genesis. There are a lot of similarities between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus. To state a few, Joseph was accused of crimes he didn't commit leading to punishments he did not deserve. He was stripped of his robe and sold for pieces of silver. He embraced God's purpose even though it would bring him severe physical harm. Joseph rejected temptation and was victorious through suffering. He was raised up to the right hand of the king (Pharaoh) to provide the food of life for the world which came to bow before him.

As we read Scripture, especially the Old Testament, it is important that we look for Jesus in every passage. After Jesus rose from the dead, he walked with two men, who didn't recognize him, and explained how the Old Testament points to him. Unfortunately, we weren't privy to that conversation, but we can be sure that Christ is present in the Old Testament.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

"For the second time Joseph became the victim of other people's spite, but he was learning to submit without resentment and rejoice in the Lord's faithfulness to His word to his great-grandfather Abraham" (Gen. 17:19).

JOYCE G. BALDWIN

"Externally it did not always appear that God was with him, for he did not always seem to be a prosperous man; but when you come to look into the inmost soul of this servant of God, you see his true likeness—he lived in communion with the Most High, and God blessed him."

CHARLES SPURGEON

## ! Three Main Points

1. Potipher's wife tried to get Joseph to sleep with her day after day and he continued to say no. Denying sexual temptation is a day after day, time after time thing.
2. We often complain that God has put us in a terrible situation or difficult place. Yet God's will is that we trust him in the midst of that situation.
3. The story of Jesus is all over this story. These two character's stories resemble each other from beginning to end.

## ? Discussion Questions

- Where in your life are you saying yes to temptation because you are afraid of momentary consequences, or seeking momentary pleasures?
- What are practical things you can start now that will help you say no to sexual temptation?

- Where do we see faith in the story of Joseph?
- If Joseph had known what would happen, do you think he still would have shared the dream with his brothers? Would you have?
- What areas of your life are you saying yes to temptation?
- Where do we see Jesus in the story of Joseph?
- Are there areas in your life that you feel like God is not showing up how you expected?
- We see in verse 2 that the Lord was still with Joseph in Potiphers house. Is God showing up in your life in the midst of trials? How?
- In verse 3 Joseph's master saw that the Lord was with him. How do you live a life where the world would make that same observation? Has anyone actually made that observation about you?
- Joseph had to refuse Potipher's wife day after day. How do you think he was able to do that?
- Is there a difference between fighting sexual temptation and other temptations? If so, how do we fight each?
- Verse 23 says that the Lord gave Joseph success in everything he did. What role did Joseph play in that?
- Do you typically think of your sin more as breaking a rule or as offending a person? How do you think it would change our mindset towards sin if we primarily thought of it as offending a person (God)?
- Joseph had a pretty messy family. What does your family dynamic look like and how is it affecting your ministry/obedience/walk with the Lord?
- What do we learn from Joseph's example by staying faithful to the Lord over an eleven year period at Potipher's household? What do we learn about God from knowing that he helped Joseph prosper through that period?
- How are you using your current situation as an excuse for disobedience?
- How are you convicted by this passage and what in your life needs to change as a result?
- How does God respond to Joseph's situation?

## Application & Practice

**Community and Accountability:** End this week by splitting up into pairs, confess sins to each other and pray for each other (James 5:16).

**Flee from sexual temptation.** For the people in your group that experience sexual temptation, come up with a plan for how to deal with it. Be specific with steps before temptation, what to do in temptation, where to go (flee!), etc. This may sound overly mechanical, but it works!

## Going Deeper

**Sermon.** Commonwealth City Church, "The Story of Joseph".

**Article.** The Gospel Coalition, "The Wonderful Similarities Between Joseph and Jesus"

**Bible.** Listen to a reading of Genesis 37-50 on the bible app to get the whole story of Joseph.

# HEBREWS 11:23-29

## Week 6: The New Moses



### Historical Context & Background

This week we are going back to Hebrews. Much of the relevant historical context was included in this section of the guide from Week 1. Hebrews spends the most time outlining the faithfulness of Abraham, but that is followed closely by the description of Moses. The events of Moses' life take up most of the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—including the entirety of Exodus. So instead of picking out one scene from Moses' life, we're going to explore how Moses' whole life demonstrated a faith which ultimately pointed to Jesus. In relation to what came before, the writer of Hebrews just finished discussing Abraham, and in the history of Abraham it seems a part of the Abrahamic promise has been fulfilled: Israel is now a great people. But a new era began, one which saw Israel in need of deliverance and a messiah. Even in their day people knew the ultimate deliverance had not occurred under Moses, and that the ultimate messiah was not Moses. Rather, Moses was a hint at who was to come.



### Related Passages

Acts 7 - This is the speech of Stephen, the first Christian martyr recorded after Christ's death and resurrection, wherein he summarizes the Genesis and Exodus stories, filling in details relevant to our discussion of Moses.

Exodus 1-3 - Especially this section intersects with much of the Hebrews passage's content.



### Key Terms

**No Ordinary Child:** This phrase (sometimes translated "beautiful") from Hebrews 11:23 comes from Exodus 2:2. It was interpreted by the generations that followed—through the early Church (see Acts 7:20)—as signifying that the parents recognized that God had a special purpose for Moses.



### Key Themes

**Faith Overcomes Fear:** The writer of Hebrews thinks that each of the things listed in verses 23-30 demonstrates some aspect of faith. One fruitful exercise is to go through each verse and ask, "What about this showed faith?" to determine what about the situation made Moses

himself or Israel as a whole trust God. This should return you to the theme from the first week of this curriculum. But here the goal wouldn't be just to define faith, but to a) see and dig deep into concrete instances of it; and b) extend the things we see from those concrete instances of faith to our own opportunities for faith. Moses exhibited faith in all kinds of areas, and so you can try to tease out what faith looks like on a college campus in 2021 in those same areas. I've included a chart below with each of the examples the writer of Hebrews gives of Moses' life, and how you could analyze them in a fruitful way. He praises five instances of Moses' faith, each starting with the phrase "By faith..."

What is the event?	What's the promise/hope?	What is the risk?	What did he/she/they do?
Moses' birth (Heb. 11:23)	God would fulfill his promise to Abraham and increase God's people; God would save Moses because he was to play a special role (see Acts 7:17-20)	He would drown in the river; the king would kill the child (and his parents for hiding him)	Moses' parents hid Moses, then put him on the Nile.
Moses' identity (Heb. 11:24-26)	Future reward in Christ (Heb. 11:26), membership in God's, people, his Anointed One (Hab. 3:13)	Mistreatment/suffering, missing out on earthly pleasure and power, losing his home.	He chose to identify with the suffering of his people (though this good choice of solidarity manifested in a sin, where he killed an Egyptian, Ex. 2:11-13)
Moses' mission (Heb. 11:27)	Freedom and a promised land (Ex. 3:7-10)	Pharaoh's wrath. In the desert: homelessness, starvation, death, exile. His own people's rebellion.	He led the Israelites away from Egypt, toward the sea, with Pharaoh in pursuit. He kept them pressing forward when the people were prepared to despair.
Moses' hope (Heb. 11:28)	Deliverance from Egypt's punishment on their firstborn.	Israel's firstborn children die.	Obeded God's design for this event, and faithfully carried out the sprinkling of blood trusting God would spare them.
Moses' journey (Heb. 11:29)	God would bring them to his promised land through the sea unharmed.	Drowning: Seeing dry land probably did not remove the terror of passing between the walls of water (Ex. 14:22)! Or else, turning back to Pharaoh to die or be reenslaved.	Commanded his people to be not afraid (Ex. 14:13). Walked by a strange and unforeseen road, over the dry floor of the Red Sea. The Sea closes, saving them from Pharaoh.

What can all of these instances show us about the content of faith? It is to proceed forward as if you have seen one who is invisible (Heberws 11:27). It is true that Moses *did* see manifestations of God—the burning bush, on top of Mt. Sinai, etc.—but in the moments of testing Moses had to rely on the promises he knew and act as if those promises were true.

**The True Exodus:** Beyond the specific association of Moses and Jesus, it is also helpful to see the parallel between the general story of the Exodus and the way that's made complete in Jesus. Doing a similar exercise as what I put above could be a fruitful avenue for discussion. I've done some for you here. If we take the basic features of the Exodus story we can see them also

fulfilled in the gospel and the life of the Church:

Exodus	The Gospel
Israel is enslaved in Egypt to Pharaoh.	Humanity is enslaved to sin, death, and Satan.
Moses is raised to deliver them from subjugation.	Jesus, the New Moses, came to deliver his people from this subjugation.
The death of the firstborn secures Israel's safe passage (Israel's sons saved via lamb's blood).	The death of Jesus, who is the pure Lamb of God, secures our deliverance.
Israel passes through the waters of the Red Sea.	The church passes through the waters of baptism (1 Cor 10:2).
Israel is given the Law of Moses.	The Church is given the Holy Spirit as its law.
Israel is led into the desert, where they are sustained by miraculous bread (manna).	The Church—already freed from bondage—still awaits the final coming of the Kingdom of God in this world; while here we are sustained by the Bread of Life, Christ's body (particularly in communion).
Israel enters the promised land.	The Church fully enters the Kingdom of God (which is yet to come).

NOTA BENE: Don't assume everyone actually knows the story of the Exodus, or even who Moses is. Biblical knowledge is no longer certainly carried in our culture. If there is a gap in this knowledge, you'll need to fill that in. Unfortunately the story is far too long to just read in group (Exodus is 40 chapters, and the story goes beyond that...), so feel free to show the Bible Project video over Exodus below, or explain the general overview of the Exodus.

**Extra — A brief word on Judaism:** This exercise means to show that Christianity is itself the fulfillment of Judaism, the full flowering of what Old Testament Judaism properly was. We might be tempted to think of the Christian faith as an off-shoot of the Judaism which today remains the same as what it was in the Old Testament. This wouldn't be how the early Christian Church thought of itself. Rather they thought of the Jews who rejected Christ as breaking off from the tree—hence Paul's analogy in Romans 11—which is the fullness of Judaism: Christianity. So Christians *need* to see the Old Testament as *properly ours*, in that it testifies to the sapling which grew into the fullness of Christ's Church. So when we examine the DNA of the sapling, we should see its connection to the flowering tree.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

**Til We Have Faces:** The story of Cupid & Psyche is a Greek myth where the mortal woman, Psyche, is taken as Cupid's lover, but is forbidden from looking upon him (she can only meet him at night). Read it to get an interesting story of one who, when she cannot see, is driven to break faith with the one who loves her. As an extra tidbit, C. S. Lewis wrote a story based on this myth called *Til We Have Faces*.



## Three Main Points

1. Faith is exercised when we act as if that which we cannot see is right beside us.
2. Faith must be exercised in every area of our lives—in our identities, in our vocations, in our dealings with the world, in the uncertainties of our journeys.
3. Jesus is the New Moses (and complete Moses) who leads his people in the True Exodus.



## Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the writer of Hebrews spent so much time on Moses? Was there something different about him from the other figures in the Old Testament, or even the other figures in Hebrews 11?
- Which element of Moses' life stuck out to you the most? Why?
- The entire book of Hebrews is meant to show us how Jesus is the fulfillment of what's seen in the Old Testament. How are these stories of Moses' life relevant to Jesus' life?
- What is Jesus' connection to the Exodus story? Can you think of any ways that Jesus fulfills those events in either literal or figurative ways?
- What are the different ways that Moses showed faith according to this passage?
- Okay, we're not Moses. What does this teach us about faith on a college campus, where Pharaohs and burning bushes and pillars of fire aren't very prevalent?
- What made Moses' acts "acts of faith"? What does it require for something to be an act of faith?
- What obstacles to Moses' faith are obstacles you're facing? Do you struggle to risk your identity, the pleasures, uncertainty, harm?
- How does the life of Jesus reflect Moses' life? Why is that important for your faith in Christ?



## Application & Practice

**Read and Reflect:** Read Exodus 1-3 and reflect on how scenes from Moses' life are comparable to those of Christ.

**Write it down.** They (you know, smart people) say that writing goals down helps us accomplish them. So, write down three components of your life in which you'd like to exercise more faith. Be creative (remember, faith is displayed in Moses' life in a variety of ways) and specific (don't just say "school" but say how).



## Going Deeper

**Video:** Scott Hahn, "Is Jesus the New Moses?"

**Video:** The Bible Project. "Exodus 1-18"

# JOSHUA 2

## Week 7: By Faith Rahab



### Context & Historical Background

In the book of Joshua we find the culmination of God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis about the Promised Land and the fulfillment of the Lord’s work in bringing His people out of Egypt through the Exodus. A non-contextualized, surface-level reading of Joshua may lead the reader to find God unnecessarily violent. Yet, as we’ll see through the stories of Rahab and Jericho, Joshua is the story of a radically loving and just God who is faithful. In our story today, the Israelites are prepared to enter the Promised Land through the city of Jericho. First, Joshua—the successor to Moses—sends two spies to scope out the city. That’s where we pick up.



### Related Passages

James 2:14-25 - Rahab receives not one but two shoutouts in the New Testament. This time as an example of the interconnectedness of faith and deeds. Rahab’s faith in the God of Israel led her directly into faithful action towards His purposes in the world.

Ruth - Another faithful woman from outside the genealogical line of Israel whose faithfulness authors the purpose of God through her inclusion in the Messianic lineage.



### Key Terms

**The Promised Land:** The land of Canaan promised to Abraham and his descendants by God in Genesis 12, of which Jericho was a part.

**Israelites:** The descendants of Abraham and those who aligned themselves with the purposes of Yahweh through which God authors his purposes throughout the Old Testament.



### Key Themes

**A Welcoming God:** It may seem as though being an Israelite is all about excluding others, but that’s simply not true. Exodus 12:38 describes a “mixed multitude” that are included in the departure of Egypt. And we frequently see God use those not born Israelites to accomplish his purposes. The story of Rahab is a refreshing reminder that God’s vision for remaking the world is wider than merely one people group.

In the story of Rahab we find a Canaanite prostitute willing to welcome Israelite spies into her home. Beyond this she proclaims that “the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” That’s quite the confession of faith. Upon this confession of faith we see a willingness from the Israelite spies to not only spare her from the coming destruction but adopt her into the Israelite family. Rahab’s adoption into the family of Israel is key, as we find in Matthew 1 that she is part of the Messianic lineage of Christ. The story of Rahab points to Christ in reminding us of God’s welcoming nature. Like Rahab, God invites us to partner with him in inviting others into the family of God. We see the ultimate manifestation of this idea in Christ, a Jewish born man from the line of David who made a way to salvation for both the Jew and the Gentile. Through Christ we, people of non-Jewish descent like Rahab, are offered a path to salvation through his death and resurrection independent of our previous moral failures. Remember, Rahab was a prostitute after all! Not only this but we are also offered adoption into the family of God. Rahab is offered a path towards “salvation” from the impending destruction surrounding her due to her people’s unwillingness to turn to the Lord. As was she, so are we.

**Testimony:** The book of Joshua stands as a beacon reminding us of Yahweh’s faithfulness to His people. He has never wavered from His promise to Abraham to make a great nation of Israel and to bring them into a good and spacious land. It’s important to remember that in these times, to have a prosperous lineage and a land to call your own would have been deeply desired due to the culture’s values. God has made a good promise to His people but it has taken time to come to fruition. In between Abraham and Joshua there have been seasons of trials, exiles, and unfaithfulness on the part of God’s people. Despite all that, Israel stands at the doorstep of the land they were promised many years ago.

With this in mind, we might expect a testimony of God’s faithfulness in the book of Joshua from a person of Israelite descent. Instead, in the story of Rahab, we find that word of God’s faithfulness to his people has spread throughout the land to the point where it simply cannot be denied. In verses 9-11, we hear a Canaanite prostitute testify of God’s faithfulness to bring his people out of exile and stand beside them both in the desert and in battle. Additionally, because she has heard all this she is certain that “the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” Rahab has come to place her faith in the God of Israel because she has heard of His faithfulness despite not experiencing it herself. This faith is what eventually saves her from the destruction of her people.

The implications of this for us today are huge. In the story of Rahab we are reminded first that God is faithful to His promises, even when the fulfillment may linger. We’re also reminded that often our greatest witness to those who do not know the Lord is our stories of His faithfulness, or testimony. Whether you currently find yourself on a mountain high or valley low, through the witness of Scripture you can declare that your God is faithful to His promises. Not only should this truth bring us personal peace, but it should also challenge us to utilize the power of story, both our own story and the stories of scripture and the lives of the saints, to include others into the family of God just as Rahab was brought into the family of Israel. Our broken world is in search of something or someone to trust and our faithful God has the ability to meet and exceed those needs.



**Countercultural Faithfulness:** Hebrews 11:31 praises the faith of Rahab due to her simple hospitality towards the spies. Though to call her hospitality simple may be to undersell just how radically countercultural her act of faith was and how it ultimately delivered her from destruction. We're not completely privy to the details of Jericho's moral corruption that led to the city's demise, though we are led to believe that the people of Jericho have no desire to align themselves with the way of Yahweh. This is even physically manifest, insofar as Jericho slams the door on Israel, locking them out. Before her verbal confession of faith in the God of Israel, Rahab's faith is displayed through welcoming Israel's spies. These men are unwelcome guests, yet Rahab is willing to place herself at odds with her city by welcoming them into her home. This places her in direct danger of harm by the authorities of Jericho. For this reason Rahab is praised again in James 2:25 as an example of someone whose faith is clearly displayed through more than just words, but actions.

How does the example of Rahab inform how we ought to live as people of faith? Our culture is not dissimilar from her's, or even Christ's, in its deviation from faithfulness to the Lord. We are not called to simply follow the whims of our day and time but to stand firm in alliance with our God, who he has called us to be, and how he has called us to act. Rahab's story also gives us the promise that to live this way will bear fruit. We see her bold faithfulness eventually rewarded in her deliverance from the destruction of Jericho. Again in the life of Christ, His willingness to stand at odds with the religious leaders of His time and to take on the cross was eventually rewarded through His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. May these faithful examples lead us to stand firm as those who partner with God in bringing His Kingdom come even as it calls us to reject the kingdom of the world.

**Canaanite Genocide:** The story of Joshua is, to some, synonymous with genocide and God issuing evil commands. We're flagging this here as a warning: it may come up in your groups and it's a good idea to be prepared if it does. However, do not allow your groups to be sidetracked by this topic. This could take up a whole week—more than a week—if you let it.

In short, any response to the question of why God would command genocide is a complicated question rooted in questions of how to approach the Bible in the first place. It's *critical* to recognize that the Bible is written in a different culture and context than the one we find ourselves in. God's goal is, and continues to be, the shaping of our wills towards good and towards God and the elimination of evil. Anything God does must be viewed through this lens. To that point, we highly recommend that you watch the videos from Lawson Stone (posted in the extra resources). In those videos, Stone talks about the violence in the Old Testament generally before talking about Joshua and the Israelite conquest specifically. They may not satisfactorily answer all of your questions, but they will be a helpful starting point.

**His Power Through Our Weakness:** 2 Corinthians 12:9 speaks a word of truth from the Lord to Paul that echoes throughout the story of Rahab. The famous verse says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Hopefully by now we're catching on to the theme that God delights in using the most unlikely people in the most unlikely ways to bring about His perfect purposes. In both the two spies sent into Jericho and Rahab we see personal and moral failures that may lead us to assume they should be disqualified from God's work in

the world. Instead, each are used to set the wheels in motion for God delivering on a centuries old promise to His people that still stands today as a testimony to His people of His divine character.

Let's start with the two spies. Now I'm no James Bond, but I do know the idea of being a spy is to get in, get out, and not be noticed. Yet, by the time we get to verse two, the king of Jericho has already been tipped off that Israelite spies are present in the city. Clearly, these two men have already brought unnecessary attention to themselves and without the aid of Rahab could've been outed before even being able to assess Jericho. In Joshua 2, we see no real top level uncover skill on the part of these two spies. The mental image of these men having a full on conversation with Rahab in verses 15-21 while being let down via a rope from the city wall is almost satirical. Yet, despite every attempt to get in their own way, they're able to return to Joshua with the news that "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands."

Then there's Rahab. The text is not shy in implying what Rahab does for a living. She is not a glowing example of morality and is certainly not a person of power or influence within the city of Jericho. Though it can be viewed as an act of bold faithfulness to deny the spies' presence when the king inquires, it is nevertheless a lie. Yet Rahab's faithfulness to these men and faith in the God of Israel is honored and utilized to bring the spies back to Joshua and eventually deliver the city into their hands. Rahab, like most of us, is a work in progress. She is an imperfect human who has chosen to align herself with the purposes of the God of Israel, and as we see in this story, He can work with that.

Our culture tempts us to be people of note who are successful and competent in all we do. It is encouraged that we sweep any personal failures or shortcomings under the rug to display a put together version of ourselves to the world. The truth of the matter is we are broken, limited, and easily tempted human beings who often find ourselves feeling more weak than strong. The grace of the story of Rahab is that God can use us even at our weakest moments. In some ways, as we're reminded in 2 Corinthians 12:9, when we are aware of our weakness we are most open to allowing God's power to fill the places where we are lacking. May we be like Rahab in our openness to God's purposes even in the midst of a culture at odds with His purposes. May we submit our broken, weak selves to His hands and trust that His power is sufficient to use us for His purposes.

## BB Quotes & Stories

***Dumbledore's Army.*** In the climatic moments of the Harry Potter series, we find a Hogwarts without Dumbledore now under the rather dark leadership of Snape and policed by death eaters. Harry, Ron and Hermione's hunt for horcruxes leads them to Hogwarts, where the final battle with Voldemort will ultimately take place. In order to even enter the school's grounds, they're in need of faithful allies to their cause on the inside of Hogwarts. Luckily there is remnant of Dumbledore's Army, a collection of students opposed to Voldemort and his followers from an earlier book in the series, remaining in the building ready to go to battle for Harry. Their

assistance in bringing Harry into Hogwarts, hiding him, protecting him, and fighting alongside him is key to his ultimate triumph over Voldemort. This faithfulness to Harry from the inside of Hogwarts, even as their culture is in direct support of Voldemort, is similar to Rahab's faithfulness to Israel even as Jericho is directly opposed to the purposes of God's people.

## ! Three Main Points

1. God's purposes are to welcome people in and not exclude them. The path to salvation is available to any who claim Christ as Lord.
2. God is faithful to his promises. Our proclamation of his faithfulness can be our strongest evangelism.
3. Faith is displayed through bold, countercultural action.

## ? Discussion Questions

- How do you hear the story of Jesus through the story of Rahab?
- Who is Israel? How does the story of Rahab challenge who is and isn't included in the family of God?
- Is God exclusive and violent in the Old Testament? How would this understanding impact our relationship with Him?
- Does Rahab deserve to be spared from the impending destruction of Jericho?
- How does the spies' decision to spare Rahab and her family connect to the Gospel narrative of the New Testament?
- If Rahab is now a part of the "mixed multitude" of Israel, how does this impact our view of the God of the Old Testament?
- Who are you tempted to exclude from the family of God? Who are you challenged to include?
- Are there conditions for inclusion in the church? Should there be?
- How does the assurance that God will deliver Jericho into Israel's hands testify to the faithfulness of God?
- What other examples do we see in Scripture that remind us of God's faithfulness?
- How have you experienced the faithfulness of God to His promises in your own life?
- How does the delayed nature of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham challenge us today to live as people of faith? What promises are you waiting for God to fulfill in your life?
- What roadblocks have you encountered as you await the fulfillment of God's promises?
- How did you first come to believe in God? In what ways was it similar or dissimilar to how Rahab came to faith?
- What flaws or examples of weakness do we see from the spies or Rahab in Joshua 2?
- How are the weaknesses of the spies and Rahab utilized to author God's purposes?
- What struggles or weaknesses lead you to disqualify yourself from God's purposes?
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us that "his power is made perfect in our weakness." How do you see this in the story of Rahab? How have you experienced this in your own life?

- What defines Rahab? Who is she? A prostitute? An Israelite? A person of faith?
- Rahab's culture was morally corrupt and directly opposed to God's purposes, yet she chooses faithfulness to Yahweh. What ties can we draw to our culture today and how we are called to live within it?
- Rahab is instructed to leave a scarlet cord in her window. Is this significant? How do passages inform the significance of the scarlet cord as the sign of Rahab's salvation?
- How does Rahab's identity as both a woman and a prostitute impact our understanding of who God is able to use for his purposes?
- Was it risky for Rahab to welcome these spies? What did she stand to lose?
- Rahab seems to be a lone faithful individual in a sea of unfaithfulness. Can you resonate with this? What would this have felt like?
- What does it look like to live out your faith in a countercultural way on campus?
- Why was Rahab included in the "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11? How would her story have spoken to Paul's audience?
- Rahab is praised as an example of the relationship between faith and action in James 2:25. How does her story speak to this relationship in the life of the believer?
- What practical steps can we take to follow the example of faith set by Rahab?

## Application & Practice

**Welcome:** Rahab's inclusion into the family of God reminds us that God radically welcomes people into his community. We are called to partner with Him in this endeavor. This week, take some time to think about an individual or a group of people that you are tempted to exclude from the family of God based on how they act, what they look like, who they hang out with, etc. Then, invite this individual or someone from this group of people to come with you to Synergy!

**Testify.** In Rahab's confession of faith in Joshua 2 we are reminded of the power of story in bringing in those outside the family of God. Take an hour this week to reflect on your personal testimony. How has God shown His faithfulness in your life? Maybe take some time to journal this out, or make an audio recording. Then, practice sharing your testimony with a trusted family member or friend. Who is God inviting you to share your testimony with?

**Live Counter-Culturally.** How does your faith in Christ call you to live in a way that's different from those around you? Make a list of ways your lifestyle does and should inevitably differ from the "typical" college life. Include both ways you already may be living differently, and ways you'd like to be living differently. Then, commit to changing one of these lifestyle practices to live counter culturally as an example of faith.

## Going Deeper

**Video:** The Bible Project, "Joshua."

**Video:** *Violence in the Old Testament*, by Lawson Stone.

# JOSHUA 5:13-6:27

## Week 8: By Faith the Walls of Jericho Fell



### Context & Historical Background

The Israelites sit at the doorstep of the land promised by God to Abraham many centuries ago. With the aid of Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who was the focus of last week's study, two Israelite spies have returned to Joshua with the news that "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands," referencing the city of Jericho. Since then, Joshua has led the people across the Jordan and prepared them to take the city through rituals of circumcision and pass-over. We pick up as Joshua and his people finally near the city and await Yahweh's instruction.



### Related Passages

Joshua 5 - The earlier portion of this chapter is the equivalent of the tough offseason workouts of a championship athlete that no one ever sees, but that prepares them for the bright lights. It's not flashy, but the Israelites preparation for the battle of Jericho is just as important as the battle itself.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31- Here, Paul reminds us that we serve a God who delights in using the foolish and the weak to display His power, just as He does in Jericho.



### Key Terms

**The Ark of the Lord:** A chest that traveled with the Israelite people carrying the Ten Commandments the Lord gave to Moses. The ark being carried around the city of Jericho serves as yet another reminder that it is God who has won the battle, not Joshua.

**Herem:** A Hebrew term referring to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, often by totally destroying them. Found in verses 17, 18 and 21, often translated as devoted. See last week's curriculum for a theology of destruction in the book of Joshua.



### Key Themes

**Obedience:** As we open this somewhat famous Old Testament story, it's important to leave our preconceived notions and VeggieTales theology at the door. To approach this story with humility and place ourselves in the shoes of the Israelites is much more likely to bear fruit than to completely check out because we've heard this one before. If we're to read Joshua 6 with fresh

eyes then we'll be shocked by the plan the Lord lays before Joshua in verses 2-5. It's illogical. It makes no earthly sense. As we'll see, this is precisely the point. Yet, what may be even more bizarre is that Joshua doesn't so much as bat an eye at these instructions and instead immediately moves to implement them. This stands in stark contrast to Abraham's doubt of God's ability to deliver him a child in his old age and Moses pleading with Yahweh to send someone else to free His people from Egypt. Somewhere along the family tree, Joshua has learned the discipline of obedience. This is why Joshua is included in Hebrews 11. He obeyed even when it didn't make obvious sense because he knew God would remain faithful to his promises.

Though the children's song may proclaim "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho," a more accurate reading of the text clearly brings to light that it was not Joshua, but Yahweh who fought, and won the battle of Jericho. He makes it clear, before Joshua so much as lifts a finger, that "I have delivered Jericho into your hands." Joshua isn't called into a grand display of military tactics and strength but rather simple, faithful obedience to the instructions of Yahweh. This isn't about displaying Joshua's power, but the Lord's. Even still, it is on Joshua and the Israelites to claim what God has already provided.

**God's Will vs The World's Way:** Obedience. Got it. Simple enough, God tells me what to do and I do it! What's so difficult about that? Well, as anyone who has journeyed the life of faith has experienced, God doesn't always call us to do what we'd like to do. His will for our lives can often run countercultural to the world's definition of success, power and progress. These ideals are especially emphasized on campus. You may be feeling the weight of expectation to get the degree, to get the job, to get the paycheck, to get the house, etc. You've likely heard it before. What are we to do when obedience isn't easy and doesn't align with our neat 5 year plan?

It's important to remember that the plan the Lord gives Joshua to take Jericho is absolutely bananas. The military elite, heck even someone today who knows nothing of combat, would call it foolishness. The Lord's instruction is in direct odds with what common sense would suggest. For Joshua to obey would mean to risk looking like a fool for the sake of obeying the Lord. Yet, it is His faith, the marker of each character highlighted in Hebrews 11, that allows Joshua to trust that God is God and he is not. He has faith that God not only knows more than he does but that He is capable of delivering Jericho into the hands of the Israelites however he wants.

We hold the promise that eternal life is ours through the death and resurrection of Christ. If we can trust Him on that, can't we trust Him with everything in between? Can we, with our chest, confidently proclaim the truth of 1 Corinthians 1:25, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom"? We may think we have our lives all figured out, or we may have no clue what lies ahead. Either way, the invitation of Joshua 6 is to simply obey the instruction that God places before us. We're called to have faith that His ways are better than our own. This is quite the slice of humble pie, but will end in much more life giving ways than our own imperfect plans. Obedience isn't easy, but it's worth it. May the story of God's deliverance of Jericho in such an odd way lead us to trust and obey no matter what He may have in store.

**Prayer:** Often the work of obedience starts long before the command is ever given. We're prone to forget that God's ways are better than our own. And perhaps just as problematic, we can't

slow down long enough to listen to him. Obedience starts with prayer and prayer starts with listening. A faithful relationship with God is, after all, a relationship.

The Israelites don't haphazardly move into Jericho. They wait for the Lord's instruction and prepare themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We shouldn't skip over the fact that in Joshua 5, instead of moving in haste towards Jericho, the Israelites pause and practice the two key rituals of their ancestors. We could hash out the details of circumcision and passover, but for our purposes this week what's important is that the Israelites took time to both devote themselves to the Lord and remember His faithfulness to them in Egypt. In other words, the preparation of the Israelites began long before they approached the walls. Without the work of listening to the Lord in Joshua 5, they might not have obeyed in Joshua 6. Before we can obey, we have to prepare our hearts to receive, and prayer is the mechanism by which we do so.

For the task-oriented do-ers out there, this is likely a difficult word. For those of us who want to part the oceans and move mountains in the name of Jesus, the invitation to simply pray can feel insufficient and even pointless. Yet the truth is that prayer is often the very means by which waves are stilled, mountains are moved, or in the case of Joshua, walls come crumbling down. We're not called to solve every problem this broken world throws at us by our own might and out of our own means. Rather, we're invited to surrender our battles to Yahweh, the one who has proved faithful to His people to win their battles time and time again. In bringing our whole selves before the Lord in prayer we stop ourselves of our often prideful self will and instead align ourselves with the will of Yahweh. When the trials of life inevitably come, will we be people of prayer, equipped with a deep relationship with our heavenly Father who is willing and able to intervene on our behalf?

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

*"We're not called to live by human reason. All that matters is obedience to God's Word and his leading in our lives. If God says go, we'll go. If he says stay, we'll stay. When we are in his will, we are in the safest place in the world."*

BROTHER YUN

*"The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin."*

A. W. TOZER

*"Partial obedience is not obedience at all; to single out easy things that do not oppose our lusts, which are not against our reputation, therein some will do more than they need; but our obedience must be universal to all God's commandments, and that because He commands it. Empty relationships are nothing; if we profess ourselves God's servants and do not honor Him by our obedience, we take but an empty title."*

RICHARD SIBBES



## Three Main Points

1. Obedience is a key marker of the life of faith.
2. Faithful obedience is often countercultural to the world's definition of success, power and progress.
3. Prayer is often the mechanism by which we submit ourselves to obedience with God's will over our own.



## Discussion Questions

- What are we to make of Joshua's encounter in 5:13-15? How does this inform our reading in chapter 6?
- The "commander of the army of the Lord" instructs Joshua to take off his sandals because he is on holy ground. Where else do we see this in Scripture? Why is this important?
- Have you heard the story of Jericho before? If so, how was it taught to you? Was this reading of the story similar or dissimilar to what you were taught?
- Why would the Lord instruct Joshua to take the city of Jericho in such an odd fashion?
- Who won the battle of Jericho? Israel or Yahweh?
- What is the role of the ark of the covenant in the battle of Jericho?
- Why do the Israelites practice circumcision and passover prior to fighting the battle of Jericho?
- Are you surprised by Joshua's response to the Lord in verse 6?
- How does Joshua's response to the Lord in verse 6 differ from the response to some of his ancestors to the instructions of the Lord?
- How does the story of Jericho relate to the story of Jesus?
- The Lord has already delivered Jericho into the hands of the Israelites without them doing anything. Does God do the same thing for us? Why or why not?
- Even though the Lord has done the work, the Israelites still have to claim the land. What is our role in claiming the fruits of life in Christ?
- How does faith relate to obedience?
- When has God asked you to do something that didn't align with your own plans? How did you respond?
- How do we prepare ourselves to obey a word from God before it ever comes?
- How is obedience countercultural?
- How is obedience related to humility?
- How are the stories of Jericho and Rahab interconnected? What is the overarching theme of the two stories?
- How do we wrestle with utter destruction we read of in Joshua 6?
- Why are the Israelites instructed to keep away from the religious things of the people of Jericho? How are we called to relate to our culture's idols in light of this instruction?
- What does Rahab's rescue from the destruction of Jericho tell us about God and his people?
- It would've been easy for the Israelites to break their promise to Rahab. Why don't they?
- In light of the events of Joshua 6. How are we to read Joshua 6:27?



## Application & Practice

**The Lord's Prayer:** A barrier to the life of prayer can be feeling we have to have the right words to say. Luckily, Jesus gave us the words we ought to pray in Matthew 6:9-13:

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one."

These words, prayed regularly, even daily, can be formative to our hearts and our minds. Of particular relevance to this week is the prayer that "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The Lord's Prayer aligns us with the will of God for his people through words prayed by our Savior himself and many saints in between. Try praying the Lord's Prayer at least once daily in the coming week.

**Remembrance.** Just as the Israelites practiced the Passover in Joshua 5, we too can remember what the Lord has done for us as we wait for his instruction. Either take time to journal and reflect on a time the Lord has shown up for you in a big way OR each day this week take time at the end of the day to name 1-3 ways, big or small, you've seen God at work.

## Going Deeper

**Article:** A. W. Tozer, "The Inseparability of Faith and Obedience".

**Study Guide:** David Guzik, "Study Guide for Joshua 6."

**Podcast:** Mia Fieldes, "A Beautiful Story".

# DANIEL 1

## Week 9: Faith in Exile



### Context & Historical Background

Last up in our Hall of faith lineup is Daniel! You may know him and his friends by some of the adventures they find themselves in such as the being in the furnace or maybe the lions' den. The author of Hebrews mentions these great events which manifested Daniel's faith. But we're going to focus on what made Daniel capable of these great acts of faith. To set the stage, this particular book in Scripture is set at the point in history when Jehoiakim was the King of Judah (2 Kings 23:34-24:17; 2 Chronicles 36:4-8). The Middle East has a long history of wars and conflict with major nations. The 6th Century BC was no exception. This period of time saw huge battles between the nations of Egypt and the Babylonians. Caught in the middle geographically and politically was Judea under Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim sided with Egypt. So, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylon, defeated Egypt in several battles he also besieged and entered Jerusalem where he gave the ultimate insult of robbing the temple in Jerusalem and removing priceless holy articles and transferring them to the temple of his god, Bel Marduk.

The Babylonians had a brilliant strategy where they took the "best of the best" young men from the cities they conquered, training them into men who would be civil servants for the king's court. So Daniel, who would have become a great leader in Jerusalem, instead finds himself with a full scholarship at a foreign "university," stuck with a new name (Belshazzar), learning a new language, new customs, new diet, etc. Put simply this isn't a great scenario. But it can teach us how to be faithful in exile.

P. S. Some of Daniel is written in an "apocalyptic" style, which often includes strange images and symbols to make a point. We won't see any of that in Daniel 1, but if students keep reading, it's something to be aware of. See the extra resources for a video by the Bible Project.



### Related Passages

2 Kings 24:1-7 & 2 Chronicles 36:4-8 - Babylon enslaves Judah

2 Kings 20:16-18 & 2 Kings 24:10-17 - Isaiah prophesies that Babylon will overcome Israel, and then the Jewish people are conquered and carried into exile.

Daniel 6:4 - This is a great depiction of the spiritual integrity that Daniel lived by.

Romans 12:2 - Summarizes the call to live in the world but not of it.



## Key Terms

**Articles from the temple God:** Beautifully crafted of gold and precious metal, these bowls and vessels would have been used in the worship and service in the temple in Jerusalem. They were carried away as plunder when the Babylonians overtook Jerusalem.

**Defile:** To make something unclean or polluted by treating it with disrespect (to use something in the way it was not intended). In this case, to touch what the Lord deemed unclean, and what he knew was wrong to partake of.



## Key Themes

**Perseverance & Exile:** Daniel and his friends found themselves in this strange new land where some king changed his and his friends' names, made him eat specific foods, and attempted to re-educate him. Essentially Babylon, a pagan nation, was handed God's people, by God and attempting to brainwash Daniel and his friends into eventually serving King Nebuchadnezzar. Can you imagine? How would you handle these circumstances? The key to this passage, though, is not their circumstances but how they react and choose to abide in God through them. Daniel avoids the full assimilation into Babylonian culture. He denied, for example, the food that had been sacrificed to false gods. He didn't completely understand his circumstances and what God was doing, yet he trusted God's character enough to persevere through the unknown.

Daniel is living as an exile. He lives under the dominion of Babylon after they have just conquered his nation and ransacked his Temple. Interestingly this is a theme that persists throughout Scripture. Paul recognizes that we live as "aliens" in this world (Eph. 2:19). The author of Hebrews says that all those who are faithful to the way of God are "strangers and exiles" in the cultures we inhabit (Heb. 11:13). Peter sees the same thing (1 Pet. 2:11-12). *So we are exiles.* Not just to this world in general, but to this campus specifically. Daniel's life enormous insight into how we live our everyday lives as exiles. In his story we see several keys to living faithfully as one who is in exile—one committed to honoring God in a world that is insistent on honoring status, power, and wealth.

- **Community:** When we are tested, God provides a way of faithfulness (1 Corinthians 10:13). Often then looks like providing us with some companions to help us. In a foreign place, under customs that aren't just *different* but are actually *antithetical* to his faith, Daniel manages to remain faithful to God. And a huge factor in that faithfulness was that *he didn't do it alone*. He surrounded himself with friends also living as exiles (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who famously will go into a fiery furnace for their devotion to God). It is within this community that Daniel discerned where the line was between living as part of a new culture and not being defiled by that culture.
- **Excellence:** Daniel and his friends are brought to Babylon to learn "language and literature," and in the end "God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning" to them. Through his knowledge and excellence in these areas, Daniel became ex-

tremely influential, and because of it he was responsible for helping pagan kings recognize God (2:47; 4:37; 6:26-27). **The takeaway: Part of being a faithful exile is being excellent in your station.** Paul says “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col 3:23). God honors faithfulness to the task at hand, in this case both spiritual and academic concerns. As students, you should be excellent like Daniel, gaining knowledge and learning.

- Rebellion: Something Daniel does beautifully is discern *when* to be rebellious and when to work with those who rule over him. We learn **two rules for living in exile**: 1. Always obey and live under authority when that authority doesn’t conflict with God (Romans 13). 2. Even if you rebel (as Daniel did), accept the consequences for your disobedience (as Daniel did), even if they’re unjust (like being fed to lions or thrown into a furnace). It’s *here* that the writer of Hebrews praises Daniel: He suffered injustice knowing God would be with him.

**The Nature of God:** So the Old Testament can be a little wild to read through at times, but one of the greatest things about being in scripture in general is getting to know the heart of God. While in this text we are looking at the front end of a 70 year exile. God delivered Judah into the hands of the Babylonians. This act of judgement, and the rise and fall of two nations reveals to us the sovereign nature of God. His seat upon the throne, as creator and as king means that He is always in control. It’s easy to read these passages and question the goodness of God, we might question, “How can a loving father hand his children over like that?” But what we see hand in hand with his sovereignty is that God is also faithful. The truth behind this judgement is that the Judeans were not living according to God’s Laws and He allowed them to face the consequences of their sin (2 Kings 24:3-4). It is important to note that allowing us to experience consequences is merely the greater effort to correct us and ultimately it’s an act of love. (We see this happen to the Israelites, and they eventually are allowed to return to Jerusalem.)

This is a great example of God as our Heavenly Father. Parents include structure in an effort to protect us, because they love us. Likewise we see that he provides and cares for those of his people who trust Him and who uphold righteousness. In the case of Daniel, who persevered and maintained a state of character that was pleasing to God, he was later rewarded for his obedience. He was given the gift of prophecy and interpreting dreams, but he was also given favor and positioned in the king’s court where he was able to bring even more glory to God. This is not to say, however, that you’re guaranteed worldly goods—money, status, power, etc.—as a result of your faithfulness; if anything the writer of Hebrews is encouraging his audience to *suffer* for the true reward, God himself. Remember Abel! His faith still speaks (Heb. 11:4), but it’s the testimony of a martyr.

**Faithfulness with Little:** Daniel and his friends decide not to “defile” themselves. It’s weird that they think something simple like food would defile them, but there’s a couple of really important things to note about this. First, there was a very literal reason they couldn’t eat: Jews had really specific dietary restrictions. To eat unclean meat was to disobey God and defile oneself. This is important because it shows us that faithfulness to God trumps faithfulness to any king, even if it’s in something small like what you eat.

But there’s a second element to this as well. Daniel knows that faithfulness in the little things is

essential to faithfulness in the big things. Christ tells us as much: “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much” (Luke 16:10). Daniel and his friends make the little decisions—not to eat certain things, to pray regularly (Dan. 6:10). The faithfulness in these little decisions leads to faithfulness in the big ones. God doesn’t deliver these four young men from their “Final Exam” before the King (vv. 18-20), but they’re faithful through it. Later, God doesn’t deliver them from being thrown into a furnace or the lions’ den, but they’re faithful to face it. They’ve been practicing.

The point is this: we can’t wait until faced with the lions’ den or the furnace to make tough decisions. We won’t do it. We have to be faithful in the little things. Can you honestly expect to say no to sex with your girlfriend, when you’ve never said no to your computer? How can we be faithful in the small things? This is the question we all need to answer.

## ☞ Quotes & Illustrations

“There is always some peace in having submitted to what is right. Don’t spoil it by worrying about the results, if you can help it. It is not your business to succeed (no one can be sure of that) but do what is right: when you have done so, the rest lies with God...”

C.S. LEWIS

***Chariots of Fire***. In 1982, the Oscar for Movie of the Year went to *Chariots of Fire*, the story of an athlete who was a Christian and died as a missionary in China. He was on the 1924 British Olympic team but refused to participate in a preliminary race at the Olympics because it was on Sunday. Eric Liddell went on to win the Gold Metal for the 400 meter dash later in the same Olympics. Later Liddell went to prison for being a missionary. Interesting that in the Japanese Prison camp where he and other civilians in China were confined, he led an athletic game for children on Sunday (after worship services) because that was the only day the Japanese allowed it.

## ! Three Main Points

1. God cares and provides for those who remain righteous and trust in him. Faithfulness in the small decisions leads to faithfulness in the big decisions.
2. There are times that God allows for his people to sit in judgement or punishment. This is an act of commitment and ultimately done because he loves his people.
3. We aren’t in our Christian walks as lone riders. Living in a faithful community is essential to discerning where the line is between living as part of a culture and not being defiled by that culture. Surround yourselves with *faithful* friends. Our sin affects our community, likewise the corporate sin of the community can affect individuals.



## Discussion Questions

- It's interesting that the whole of Judah was put into exile when it might not have been every individual Judean who was doing evil in the sight of God. Rather, God gave a corporate punishment. Is there a time you can think of where your sin affected someone else? Or a time when you were affected by someone else's?
- What does judgment look like for God's people today? Does God allow his people to sit in judgement?
- Put yourself in Daniel's position. How would you have handled those circumstances?
- What does this passage reveal to you about God?
- How are the exiles in Daniel 1 relevant to us?
- What does it mean to live righteously?
- What area of your life are you struggling to trust God?
- What are some of our responsibilities as Christians on campus?
- What does it look like for you to persevere?
- What cultural temptations have you or are you struggling to resist?
- Why do you think God inspired this story to be included in Scripture?
- If God doesn't always deliver us from exile, trials, the furnace, the lions' den, then what does he deliver us from? Is that enough? Why do we go through those things?
- Do you feel perfectly at home in the contexts in which you live—your classes, your family, your dorm or sorority or with your old high school friends? Or do you feel like an exile? If you find that you don't feel like an exile, why do you think that is? Should you feel different?
- How do you think Daniel was able to remain faithful—living out God's way in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's world? What factors made his faithfulness possible?
- How does this story relate to this campus?
- Daniel lived as a faithful member of a foreign nation. What is our role as Christians who are citizens in the United States?
- What are the parallels between the young Hebrew men at "Babylonia University" and your situation at UK? The differences?
- What are all the things that Daniel and his friends had to allow to be changed? (For example their names, their language, their clothing, their studies.) Why did they draw the line at their food? Where should we draw the line?
- How did they get Ashpenaz on board to change their food? How is this an example of how we should negotiate our differences with a hostile culture?
- How do you feel about God helping them learn *all* kinds (not just Jewish) of literature and learning? Does that mean your mom was wrong for not letting you read *Harry Potter*?
- Daniel served in the King's court for over half a century. What is the value of longevity?
- Where do you see your faith convictions being tested or compromised by those in authority over you? Are you responding with conviction or compromise?

## Application & Practice

**Fasting:** Daniel chose not to defile himself with the royal foods and to prevent himself from completely adhering to the Babylonian authority. As Christians we have a similar call today to live in the world and love those around us, but not to become a part of the world. Is there something in your life that has a tendency to pull you into the sinful nature of campus culture? Let's try fasting from that for five days, whether it is certain food or drinks, music, movies/tv, events and activities. Also if you need accountability, tell someone in your group!

**Read.** Scripture is the best way for us to get to know God (all of it, not just the New Testament). Pick a book in the Old Testament to read through and invite God to reveal to you more of Himself. Remember, it's ok to have questions or to not understand immediately. Actually, it is a good thing to have questions!

**Learning.** This week do ALL of your homework and study diligently. During class time, participate in a way that demonstrates excellence. Now don't be the annoying student who talks just so people hear him talk, but respond *thoughtfully* when questions are asked. If you want bonus points here, go to a professor's office hours and discuss something you found interesting about what you're learning.

## Going Deeper

**Sermon:** John Mark Comer, "Life in Exile: Compromise."

**Article.** *Desiring God*, "Live on Earth as Citizens of Heaven."

**Video.** The Bible Project, "Daniel."

# HEBREWS 11:32-12:3

## Week 10: Christ: Author and Perfecter



### Context & Historical Background

To finish our semester, we're zooming back out to revisit Hebrews 11 and the first smidge of Hebrews 12. If you've sensed one theme over the course of this semester, it ought to be that these stories of Hebrews 11 are all part of one larger story. That is, each of these stories of the faithful points to the pioneer and perfecter of faith, Jesus Christ himself. In this passage, the author connects the stories we've been reading all semester to Christ and reminds us that these stories should challenge us to run boldly into the life of faith.



### Related Scriptures

Isaiah 53 – An Old Testament prophecy pointing to Jesus, the man of sorrows. This scripture is helpful in reminding us of Christ's suffering and ultimate deliverance referenced in Hebrews 12. In His suffering Christ is connected to both our heroes of the Old Testament and our own sufferings today.

Philippians 2:1-18 – Another reference to Christ's suffering and exaltation with practical instructions from Paul on how we ought to live the life of faith in light of Christ's example.



### Key Terms

**Aphorao:** A Greek word used in Hebrews 12:2 meaning "to look away from all else in order to see distinctly." The author uses this word in regards to how we ought to look towards Christ as people of faith.

**Messiah:** The promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. This is the promise that those commended for their faith in Hebrews 11 did not have fulfilled in their lifetimes. Though the author tells us that the promised Messiah, in the form of Christ, is the one who makes both us and those commended perfect.



### Key Themes

**Faith in Waiting:** In verses 32-38 we find a key duality to the nature of our faith. In verses 32-35a we find the stories of those who were able to accomplish great things by faith in the name



of the Lord. Then in the following verses we hear the stories of those who needed their faith to face all kinds of great challenges and suffering. If given the choice between accomplishing great things and facing challenges, I suspect most of us would choose the former. However, we'll soon find that facing challenges and trials is part of our life in this world. Our experience in this broken world can leave us needing our faith as a lifeline rather than a weapon. We can take comfort in knowing that our story of trial or suffering is not new or unique and that in these times we can lean on the same faith that delivered the heroes of scripture. Whether we find ourselves on mountain high or valley low, faith is key.

Hebrews 11 closes with a cliffhanger that was never meant to truly function in this way. After all, the chapter breaks were something added later, not something intended by the original author. In verses 39-40, we're reminded that though these heroes of faith were able to accomplish great things and endure great challenges, they did not receive the fullness of the promise they longed for. Israel was a people awaiting a Messiah who would change everything. This faith was enough to sustain all the heroes we've met over the course of this semester. We ought to be both inspired and challenged by this because we live in the fulfillment of their faith. "God had planned something better for us," says the author of Hebrews. In the person of Jesus, we can possess more, not less, faith than all those commended in Hebrews 11.

***Faith in Christ:*** All semester, we have sought to connect the stories of those Old Testament heroes in Hebrews 11 to Jesus Christ. In the opening of Hebrews 12, the author finally does the same. As we reach the end of the semester, you may find yourself asking questions like, what are we to do with all these stories of faith, what should we take away, and how should our lives change? For the author, the answer is direct and simple: "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This may be a good point to mention that how this looks for each person will likely be different. In Hebrews 11 we find a great diversity of stories of faith with no two looking exactly alike. We are not called to look to the right or the left and compare our own race with the race of our brother or sister. Rather we are called to be faithful to what the Lord has set before us, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Though our race may not look identical, we as the body of Christ ought to be unified in seeking after Christ.

Why can we look to Jesus above all the rest of our Old Testament heroes? The answer lies in how his story is both similar and dissimilar to the stories we've already heard. Like many of the stories we encounter in Hebrews 11, Jesus was no stranger to suffering. He "endured the cross" and "endured such opposition from sinners." We can take solace in the truth that our Savior has experienced pain in human life, he was fully human and is therefore fully able to meet us in our brokenness. Yet He is also "the pioneer and perfecter of faith" and sits "at the right hand of the throne of God." He not only endured suffering but fully overcame it in a way that no person had before and has since through His triumph over death itself. In Jesus, we have something better. In considering the life of Christ we "will not grow weary and lose heart." We may be able to look to Abraham, Moses, or Joshua for a momentary jolt of inspiration or insight, but a faith built on any of these imperfect people is bound to leave us longing for more. Only faith in Jesus can supply the strength we need to both conquer kingdoms and endure persecution.

**Fixing our eyes:** What do you find yourself fixing your eyes on? Are your eyes on worldly success, a degree, a job, a title? Are your eyes fixed on a person, a family member, friend, or significant other? Are your eyes fixed on your screens, Instagram, Netflix, or even pornography? These are just a few examples of what we often find ourselves tempted to fix our eyes on, especially when the pressures and trials of life push us to seek an escape. Hebrews 12:2 offers a different invitation, to fix our eyes on Jesus. Does this mean to add Jesus as just another thing to divert our attention to amongst a long list of other things? The Greek word used here, *aphorao*, seems to imply the author is urging us to do more than just that. *Aphorao* means “to look away from all else” in order that we may see more distinctly. To run the race of faith, we can’t just look to Jesus on Sunday mornings, at core group, or at Synergy, but always. More than that we, as people of faith, ought to look away from anything that is not Christ Himself. Put more directly, the things that keep us from seeing Christ more distinctly are the exact things we need to look away from if we hope to have a faith we’ve been learning about all semester.

Once we look away from the world and towards Christ, we are invited to look at Him in all of His fullness. We are invited to see the compassion Christ is able to offer to our experience because He was fully human. We are invited to see Jesus the pioneer, who has been there from the beginning and faithfully walked alongside His people in the Old Testament, even if they didn’t know it or yet know Him. We are invited to see Jesus the perfecter, who alone makes us, and the heroes of the Old Testament righteous in the sight of God by His blood. We are invited to see Jesus the servant, who was willing to take on the scorn and shame of the cross with joy, even though He was God. We are invited to see Jesus the enthroned Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father who eagerly awaits the fulfillment of our salvation at the end of times. Finally we are invited to see Jesus the patient sufferer, who didn’t give up too early but persevered to the very end so that the Lord’s will may be complete through Him. Jesus ties it all together, he is alpha and omega, he fulfills the longings of the Old Testament and sustains us in our faith today. In the fullness of knowledge and relationship we Christ, may we find the faith to throw off the sin that entangles and run the race of faith.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

***The End Illuminates the Beginning:*** In the stories of the heroes of faith, we see people who were faithful to God and his promises. Yet, those promises are fulfilled in and through Jesus. Without him, their promises and faithfulness mean nothing.

This, like many stories, is a case of the end illuminating what’s gone before. To take two obvious examples from popular movies: *Star Wars* and *The Sixth Sense*. \*SPOILER ALERTS\* In *Star Wars*, the big reveal is Darth Vader’s revelation to Luke that he is Luke’s father. This requires the watcher to look back over previous plot points and see them anew. Likewise, in *The Sixth Sense*, Bruce Willis’s character discovers at the end of the movie that he has been dead the whole time. Again, this new piece of information (previously unknown to the viewer) challenges us to rethink all that’s happened before. Like these examples, Christ is the end that challenges us to rethink all that’s gone before. We can reevaluate these faithful folks through Christ’s faith and see them anew.



## Three Main Points

1. Though the faith of those mentioned in Hebrews 11:32-38 are commended for their faith, it was a faith in waiting. A faith, that is, waiting to be fulfilled by the Messiah.
2. We have received the fulfillment the faithful once longed for in Christ Jesus. We have a cloud of witnesses who can inspire, but only Christ can strengthen us.
3. To be people of faith we must continually look away from the world and towards Christ alone.



## Discussion Questions

- Which story of faith from the Old Testament did you connect with the most? Why?
- Do you resonate more with those commended in Hebrews 11:32-35a or 11:35b-38? How so?
- How does the unfulfilled nature of the faith of the Old Testament heroes change how you view their faith?
- If the people of the Old Testament were able to live with such faith before Christ, how are we to live as people of faith who know Christ?
- In what ways should our faith be similar to that of the Old Testament believers, in what ways should it be different?
- Are you tempted to compare your faith journey with the journey of others? If so, how does this comparison game leave you feeling?
- What does it look like for the body of Christ to be made up of unique individuals yet remain one unified church?
- How is Jesus like the heroes of the Old Testament?
- How is Jesus different from the heroes of the Old Testament?
- Why is it important that Jesus suffered in his human life?
- Why is it important that Jesus overcame the suffering he experienced in his human life?
- Have you ever placed your faith in someone of great morals, but who wasn't Jesus? How did this impact you?
- What do you find yourself most often "fixing your eyes" on?
- What does it mean to fix our eyes on Christ?
- What is one thing you'd like to be held accountable to "look away" from in the coming week?
- What aspect of Christ, referenced in Hebrews 12:1-3, is most difficult for you to believe? Why?
- We're told that Jesus went to the cross for the "joy set before him." What does this mean?
- What is the relationship between joy and suffering?
- What will you carry with you from this semester's core group curriculum?
- What's one practical step you feel led to take to strengthen your faith? Who can you invite to take this step with you?

## Application & Practice

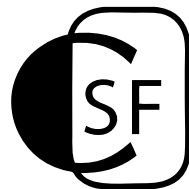
**Fasting:** If “fixing our eyes on Jesus” means to “look away” from all else, fasting may be a fruitful practice in fixing our eyes on Jesus. Fasting can be from food, technology, or really anything that’s keeping us from focusing on Jesus. Take a day this week to “look away” and replace the time you would’ve spent eating, on social media, or whatever you’re fasting from to spend time with the Lord.

**Create your cloud.** Hebrews 12:1 reminds us that we are “surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” in reference to the Old Testament heroes of Hebrews 11. Who makes up your “great cloud of witnesses.” In other words, whose faith inspires you to fix your eyes on Jesus? Take time this week to make a list of these people. These can be people from Scripture, friends, leaders, mentors, or family members. Then, intentionally spend time with these people over your break. Spend time in Scripture with a character that inspires you, or grab coffee with a mentor who sets a great example of faith. Remember that these people aren’t Jesus, but are those who point you toward Him!

## Going Deeper

**Sermon Text:** John Chrysostom, “Homily on Hebrews 11:37-40.”





CHRISTIAN STUDENT FELLOWSHIP  
[www.ukcsf.org](http://www.ukcsf.org)