

[BUILD]

“... arise and build”

Nehemiah 2:20

Family Devotion
Week Two

FAITH FOR THE PRESENT



THE TESTING OF FAITH

Abraham had to wait 25 years before the promised son was born. By then he was 100 years old; his wife, Sarah, was 90. Yet God superceded the laws of nature to allow the birth of a child to an elderly, barren couple. They named their son Isaac, meaning “laughter,” for he brought unspeakable joy to them.

After Isaac had grown into young manhood, the word of God came once again to Abraham. He commanded: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.” The message continued: “Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2).

Still believing, Abraham obeyed the voice of God and took his boy on that long, agonizing trip to the bleak slopes of Moriah. Though he did not comprehend God’s purpose, Abraham’s faith was not shaken. He complied with the instructions, placing his dear son on the altar and raising a knife to plunge into the young man’s chest. In the very act of lifting the knife to slay his son, God stopped him. He commanded Abraham to kill instead a ram caught in a nearby bush.

Would he have gone through with it? Would the old man have actually killed his own beloved son? We need not wonder. Hebrews 11:19 provides the answer: “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” Yes, he would have done it, for he was already expecting God to raise his son from death!

What an extraordinary story which causes us to wonder, what could we possibly have in common with Abraham? Many things! As God spoke to Abraham, He speaks to you. As God called Abraham to a life of obedience, He calls you. As God tested Abraham, He tests you. As God called Abraham to a life of faith, so God calls you.

Think on and discuss the parallels between yourself and Abraham. If possible, identify some specific ways these are revealed in your life.

WHAT IS FAITH?

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

In order to tap the endless resources of God, the believer must exercise faith by acting in obedience to God’s Word. As the Apostle Paul explained to the Romans, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). When one is prompted by the Word of God or by the leadership of the Spirit, obedience to that prompting is an expression of faith. Such a response enables one to enter into partnership with God, and gives the assurance of success even though the end may not be in sight.

When Noah was directed by God to build an ark, he obeyed by starting a project which lasted for 100 years. Noah had never experienced a flood nor had he even seen rain, yet he obeyed with regard only for the Lord. Since the command of God came without a specific schedule, Noah had to believe and act accordingly because faith has no time limit.

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah, “when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.” The fear was not fright, but a deep and abiding respect for the Lord and a confidence in His Word. Faith was the only reasonable response for Noah, as it is for us today. As we look to the church’s future we can’t see it perfectly, but we can know that God will honor our obedience to Him in the commitments we make.

Encourage each member of your family or devotional group to ask, Lord, what do you want me to do in our capital stewardship campaign? Whatever His leading, respond in faith.

WHY DO WE NEED FAITH?

A personal relationship with God is established by faith and a continuous fellowship with God is maintained by faith. Paul told the Colossians, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Col. 2:6). We receive Him by faith, and we walk in Him by faith. Without faith we cannot please God, and we cannot live effectively for Him. “Without faith,” the Bible says, “it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

Second Kings, chapter 5, records the story of Naaman, a powerful Syrian military leader who was suffering from the most dreaded disease of that era, leprosy. Someone told him that Elisha, the man of God, could possibly heal him, so he sought the prophet’s help. Elisha instructed Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to be healed. The great soldier became angry at such a ridiculous suggestion. “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy,” said Naaman to his servants (2 Kings 5:11). At first he refused, but without any other remedy, Naaman at last went into the river and was healed. The act made no human sense, but in the divine plan it was an act of faith.

Why do we need faith? There is no other way to relate to God, for in His infinite plan He has determined that “the just shall live by faith.”

On your own, with your family, or in a small group, identify one thing you consider an act of faith. Determine to do that thing, and keep a record of the evidence of God’s blessing on obedience in that behavior. Share the results.

ACTING ON THE PROMISES

William Tyndale was perhaps the most important person in the illustrious history of the English Bible. He was, in fact, not only the father of the modern English Bible, but the father of the modern English language. His translation, first published in 1525, and used subsequently in virtually every other major translation for hundreds of years to follow, was the new standard for English expression. By quoting the Bible, Shakespeare quotes Tyndale more than 5,000 times!

William Tyndale did not live an easy life. He was hunted, persecuted, and eventually killed by those who considered his work evil. Putting the Scriptures in a language common people could read? Preposterous! Yet he pursued this goal because he was motivated to communicate what he considered the “lost message of the church” – the message of faith. Tyndale defined faith as “acting on the promises of God.” It’s doubtful we could come up with a better definition.

As you consider that phrase – acting on the promises of God – how are you exercising faith today? What promises are you claiming, and how are you living out that reality? For today, identify one specific promise of God that is especially important and significant. Share that promise with others, and consider how you can act on its certainty.

HOW TO WALK BY FAITH

George Mueller hadn't faced a situation quite like it. Before him were 120 orphans, expectantly seated at long dinner tables. But something at this mealtime tested the mettle of Mueller's heart. On the dinner plates at that table was...nothing but water. Eager faces looked toward him, as if to say, "What's for dinner?" But he didn't know; the cupboard was bare and the icebox was empty. There was no milk, and no money to buy food or drink.

What was George to do? It didn't take long for him to decide. He would do what he had done every other mealtime. He would instruct the children to bow their heads and join him in thanking God for the meal they were about to eat. He would praise God for the faithfulness of His provision. And so he did. Mueller prayed simply, directly, and with a heart filled with faith.

When the "amen" was pronounced, the plates were still empty. But as the eyes of those 120 youngsters turned again to the head table, a knock sounded at the door. One of the boys was sent to answer. A moment later, he called out, "Mr. Mueller, it's the vegetable man! He's got a lot of stuff for us!" "Coincidentally," there were many vegetables that would spoil if he didn't do something with them. While the vegetables were being unloaded, another person came to the door – the butcher! He had run out of ice at the end of a hot day and faced the prospect of awful, rotting meat. Could the orphanage use it? No sooner had he spoken the words than another amazing "coincidence" occurred. The milkman's wagon pulled up, overloaded with milk and dairy products and needing desperately to do something with them!

Needless to say, it was quite a banquet that night. And it was the finest lesson in faith those orphans ever received. Would the same thing have happened had Mueller not prayed, believing God for His provision ahead of time for it? We don't know, but we do know that Jesus said we have not because we ask not. And we know that His will for us is to walk by faith, not by sight.

God is calling each member of the church family to answer a vital question: Do you have the faith to trust God for His provision? As we move toward the future – personally and corporately – this must be our attitude.