

Fellowship Bible Church
Sermon Series: God's Hall of Fame
"Faith Is Obedience"
10-30-2011
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Text: HEBREWS 11:8-12, 17-19

Father, we thank You that You have called us to be a part of what You are doing. It is absolutely amazing because of the generosity of this body this past week. Even those in need had their needs met and they were able to share with others who had need that we didn't know about. Thank You, Father. From what we can determine there are 10 new people in heaven because of the generosity of this church. LORD, we pray that You will do it more. We pray that there will more people who will respond to the glorious gospel of our Savior. LORD, continue to bless us. Continue to help us to open our hearts and to respond to what You are leading us and telling us to do. God, we pray that You will use us and You will use all of these resources, every dime, every penny, to advance Your cause. Protect us, LORD, from going down paths that You don't want us to pursue, but may we not miss everything that You have in store for us. God, I just pray, LORD, that people will know in this community and around the world that we exist not for our glory but for the glory of God. May the hope and love of Jesus always be the signature of Fellowship Bible Church. We love You, Father, and thank You for what You will do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now I want everybody to look at their watches. Okay, take a look at your watch. We have a long way to go and a short time to get there, and I am hoping that I will be able to land the plane just 5 minutes over, okay? Is that all right? So at 12:15 if I see you all slipping out, I know it ain't all right with you [laughter]. Lock the doors, no don't do that. We will have a riot in this place.

If you have your Bibles I want you to meet me in Hebrews chapter 11. You can leave your Bible open there for awhile. We began this series last week on faith. It is a five-part series on faith. I am not very original in the title because everybody I know of for years, and I don't who originated this but I have heard a lot of people refer to Hebrews chapter 11 as God's hall of faith or God's hall of fame. These are biographical snapshots of men and women who trusted and believed God during their moment in history. I need to say this and I want to underscore this. Please don't forget this. You can go to sleep after I make this statement, okay, but I want you to hear this statement. There is no Christianity apart from faith. There is no Christianity apart from faith. Faith is the Christian life. Paul put it this way in Colossians 2:6. He says:

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the LORD, so walk in Him."

How do you receive Him by faith? How do you live by faith? I just need to say this. Faith just dominates every page of the Bible. It is all the way through there. I just have to say this to you, that the gaps in your life and the gaps in my life, the gap between where I am and where I need to be and where I am and what I would like to see God do, where I am and where I need to be, all of that gap there is a God-given gap. God gives us gaps to exercise and to grow our faith. Faith is important. Faith is huge. The impact of your Christian life is in direct proportion to your ability to believe God. I mean that is a major piece. It is directly proportionate to your ability to believe God.

How many of you have ever been in any of those team-building things where you do these kinds of things where you have to trust the people that you work with? I have to tell you this. I hate those things, but I have been in them. I remember several years ago when I was with Campus Crusade for Christ with the U.S. cabinet

when we went out to the high Sierras of northern California and found this dude that does rock climbing. I thought he was a kamikaze. So this was this team-building thing. The next day they take us to the top of this deal. It is like 200 to 250 feet straight down, right? They put all of these girdle things on you, whatever those deals are, and it was a team-building thing. What you had to do was rappel down almost over 200 feet and trust that the two dudes holding your rope wouldn't let it go. Well, I have to tell you before I went down I gathered them together and said, "If I have ever done anything to you....[laughter], please forgive me. I will send you Christmas cards and remember your birthday. I really do like you." Or have you been at the one, and some of us have done these things, the one where they take you in another room and they blindfold you and then they take you back in the room and they tell you (you can't see a thing) that your colleagues are standing behind you. So, what you have to do is just fall back and trust that they will catch you. I have to tell you this. I have always cheated on that. I said, "If you let me fall I am going to bust you in the jaw." We have done that.

Those are great pictures of what faith is all about. Faith never is about the ability to quantify and qualify and affirm and confirm the information before you act. That is not faith. Faith is always, and now we have a trustworthy God, but faith is acting on that trust. I said last week that faith even when it is a noun it is a verb. Faith is something that you do. It is not about content. It is not about talk. It is not about these things. It is not about wishful thinking. Faith takes action on what we say that we believe. In Hebrews chapter 11 beginning this week and for the next three weeks the way I have organized the text and have decided to do is to make each one of the messages a statement because I really believe that is in the back of the mind of the writer of Hebrews. There is an aspect of faith, a doing part of faith, that each one of these biographical snapshots is telling us. So, we are going to look at Abraham today and here is the statement. The statement today is that faith is obedience. There is no such thing as faith apart from obedience. Faith is obedience. Faith is obedience. Faith is what you do. Now let me just read, beginning at verse 8, Hebrews chapter 11, verses 8 through 12 and then verses 17 through 19.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place
that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out,
not knowing where he was going.
By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land,
living in tents with Isaac and Jacob,
heirs with him of the same promise.
For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations,
whose designer and builder is God.
By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive,
even when she was past the age,
since she considered him faithful who had promised.
Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead,
were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven
and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

Now drop your eye down to verse 17.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac,
and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,
of whom it was said,
“Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.
He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead,

from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

Now here in this text the writer of Hebrews is underscoring the fact that faith is obedience. He is using the biography of Abraham to drill this down. I think he is saying three big statements about Abraham’s obedient faith.

- (1) He obeyed God when he didn’t know where he was going.
- (2) He obeyed God, and we obey God, when we don't know when God will fulfill His promise.
- (3) He obeyed God, and we obey God, when we don't know why God is calling us to do the excruciating.

This is the legacy of our faith. This is not theoretical. This is big Christian stuff, and this is what God calls us to do. Now hang in there. I need to drop this into a context here. Faith says that we exist for the glory of God and the accomplishment of His purposes through our lives. That is the reason why you have gaps in your life. That is the reason why I have gaps in my life. The reason why you never have everything that you need, the reason why you never had “tangibly the resources that you need,” is because faith is never about you. Faith is never about me. Faith is not about us. Faith is always about the glory of God and it makes the statement that God wants to accomplish His purposes through our lives. So, He intentionally never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever gives us everything that we need to do or what He calls us to do. He always gives us the gap, because He wants the spotlight to be on His glory and it is what He wants to do through us. So, faith and disobedience are contradictions. The way we press into knowing what God wants, even though we have yet to receive it -- remember, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” the gap there, the way we grab hold of that is through literal steps of obedience - obedience in the darkness.

This drives us to this whole idea that faith assumes. Here is the assumption of faith. Faith assumes God’s complete authority to run the affairs of our lives and accomplish His purposes through us. Faith is the acknowledgement of God’s authority. When you exercise faith, you are acknowledging God’s authority. Faith always says Crawford, it is not about you. It is about God. It is about His authority. It assumes that God has the right to run my life. It assumes that God has the right to orchestrate the events in my life. Faith assumes that God wants to use me to accomplish what He wants to get done. That is the assumption of faith. That is the reason why we have faith, and by the way if you think of it that way you will understand that is the reason why God will not tell you everything, all the details, about what He wants done in the future in and through your life. It is not going to happen. He is not going to tell you. It is not going to happen.

Now bear with me. The idea of authority has fallen on hard times in our culture. It has fallen on hard times. We don't like that concept of authority. We don't like it. We don't like somebody telling me what to do. We would rather view ourselves as cooperating with God. In fact, we have sort of reduced God. We think that God exists for our happiness and for our fulfillment and for our joy and we make these crazy, idiotic conclusions about God. You know if He does not make me feel good then that couldn’t be God because He is a loving God. So, we begin idolizing our own desires and we begin coddling ourselves and we start pimping God and using God and leveraging God for our lifestyles and for what we want. We feel like we deserve happiness. I have to tell you that is not the faith of the Bible. Faith assumes that God is outside of us. Yes, He is in us. Faith in the Bible assumes that God is sovereign. He is in control. It is not so much about my happiness, but my happiness and my fulfillment comes as a result of doing His will – what He wants. I have to tell you this. In these United States we are one entitled group of people, and that is the reason why we plateau in our walk with God because we have theologies that make the dastardly assumption that God would never make me do anything that makes me uncomfortable. Who says? Who says? Now we bristle against anything or anyone who points us toward doing anything that we don't want to do. Now here is the big take away. You can go to sleep. This summarizes everything, but the point that Abraham

teaches us in this text, the point that he teaches us, is that without the submission and obedience which faith requires there would be little or nothing of God about our lives. I want you to hear that. You can play it safe if you want to. You can control your life if you want to. You know, the irony is God sometimes lets us do that. You can control your life if you want to. You can play it safe if you want to. You cannot do anything that you can't control if you want to. What will happen is that you will have a veneer of Christianity that won't have any depth. You will be a surface Christian. You will be relegated to a bunch of empty plateaus and you will be so terribly shallow that there won't be anything supernatural about your life and no supernatural legacy to point them to future generations. You can do that. What Abraham teaches us here is that submission and obedience allows God to write His autobiography through my life. That is what Abraham is showing us. Obedience in the darkness is God's training and breaking process.

Yeah, but it is a paradox. Our self-reliance is broken, but our faith is strengthened. It is amazing. The best way of getting your self-reliance broken but proving the greatness and magnificence and the power of God is to begin to embrace the faith journey, to begin to embrace it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said one act of obedience than 100 sermons. It is so true. I said this last week. Faith, although a noun, is a verb. It is something that we do.

Now in the Bible Abraham is known as the man of faith. He is spoken of as the supreme illustration of faith throughout the Bible. He is the father of faith. He is the ground of everything that relates to God. The whole message of justification by faith hovers around the person and work of Abraham. He is enormous. Abraham is God's picture of how He works with His people always. God never works in His people's lives apart from faith. He won't do anything in your life apart from faith. He won't do anything in my life apart from faith. He won't do anything in this church apart from faith. You can try to control it if you want to. You can try to manage it if you want to. You can try to kind of like keep it over here if you want to, but God will not work in your life and he will not work in my life. He will not work in this church significantly apart from faith. The saga and journey of Abraham's life is the prototype of how God wants to work through every life, every pilgrim, every follower of Jesus Christ – for “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Now having said that in this text Abraham teaches us that faith is obedience. Now let me give you the three biggies, because I am going to have to water ski here, the three biggies in this passage that I read to you. One is: Abraham is teaching us that we obey God when we don't know where we are going. Secondly, we obey God when we don't know when God will fulfill His promises. Thirdly, we obey God when we don't know why God is calling us to do the excruciating. Those are the three big lessons of faith that you learn from Abraham. Not having knowledge is not a reason to not trust God. Abraham teaches us this – that it is always right to trust Him. It is always right to believe Him.

1. WE OBEY GOD WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING (11:8-10)

A. Act On What We Know (v. 8)

First of all, we obey God when we don't know where we are going. That is found in Hebrews 11:8-10. I just read that to you but hold your finger there and go back to Genesis chapter 12. This is the call of Abraham. I want to read verses 1-3 and the first three words of verse 4:

“Now the Lord said to Abram,
“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house
to the land that I will show you,
and I will make of you a great nation,

and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and him who dishonors you, I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

And then these three words where there is no dialog, no discussion, no focus group, no test – only these three words:

“So Abram went.”

When God speaks, you always move. When He speaks, you move. “So Abram went.” Verse 8 tells us back in Hebrews chapter 11:8 that we act on what we know. We act on what we know. “By faith Abram obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he would receive an inheritance.” God told him to go. The only thing he knew was God told him to go. “Where” was not explained and “when” he would get there was not explained. The route was not necessarily explained. When God speaks you get in gear. God spoke; Abram moved. Abraham moved for he understood God and he understood it is not a good thing to try to negotiate with God. Once His voice is clear, you put it in gear. You move.

Now listen, planning is not wrong, but there are times in our lives in which the Lord will put us in circumstances and give us an assignment where planning is absolutely useless. Now I am a great believer in planning. I am a great believer in doing that. By the way, there are plenty of passages in the Bible that talk about that and the Bible is not down on planning, as long as planning does not hinder the work of God, as long as your plans do not box God in and as long as the plans reflect what He wants to do and not necessarily “my agenda” that I am dictating to God what He ought to do. But, Abram got it in gear. God spoke and Abram moved. Abram was told to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household. He was told nothing about the land to which he must go.

As I read this myself and I think about my own walk with God, I just pray that every last one of us will develop in our hearts and life a passion for the Word of God that when God speaks I act, and we will stop procrastinating and stop putting off and stop bargaining with God and stop treating God as if He has some speech impediment. When He speaks, we move. We get it in gear. My goodness, if I don't finish this message and I am not berating anyone here and neither am I giving anyone a tongue lashing, but I have to tell you Christianity in the west here is a little bit nauseating with the arrogance by and through which we live for God. We assume that God exists to be our little pet dog or something that He gives us comfort, and we can do with Him whatever we want to. It is all about my journey. It is all about where I am right now and certainly He exists to make me happy and I am not fulfilled so I will call on God to make me happy before I move. That is not the way it works. Our reverence for God says when God speaks we act. We stop treating Him as if He is some little glorified counselor on retainer. When God spoke, Abram moved. He left.

Faith not only means to go somewhere. Faith often means to leave something. It means to leave something. I had the wonderful joy of spending some time with our oldest son last week. We both had the privilege of doing a joint seminar up at the Billy Graham Center at The Cove. It was just wonderful to hang with Bryon. It was wonderful to be with him. We spent some time together. We left there and about an hour or so down the road is the old homestead where my great-grandfather Peter, who was a slave, lived. We went to the cemetery behind Thomas Chapel AME Church. It was just a fabulous wonderful time of hanging there together. All of our kids have left, every last one of them. If I had my way, if Karen and I had our way, we would want Bryon to pastor maybe in the south side of Atlanta, Bryndan to be a pastor in another part of Atlanta, my daughter Heather and her husband to come in and be the music worship pastor in some other church in Atlanta. My daughter Holly and her husband are both physicians. Why can't you do your residency

here? There are a lot of hospitals here. You all come on home. No, no. That is not the way it works. You have to teach your children and teach yourself. You have to stop controlling your family and stop having them live out expectations and making terrible assumptions. No, you raise your kids to walk with God. You raise your kids to listen to God. You raise your kids to go. You raise your family to go. You raise them with the understanding that the greatest thing you could ever do is obey God, even if it means it hurts me, even if it means that I long to be with you. I found myself thinking that way as we drove on Friday. I said, "Gee, I wish, and then the Lord spoke to me." They are doing what God called them to do.

God basically told Abram two things. He told him number one to go. That ain't heavy, and he went. But secondly He said what He, God, would do for him. There are four things. This is what He said. This is all Abram had to know. God said go and God said this is what I am going to do for you. (1) I am going to bless you. (2) You will become a great nation. (3) You will be a blessing to many, and (4) you will bless those who bless Israel. And he said, "Now where am I going? Are there restaurants there? Is there a hotel there? How long do you want me to travel? When do I know I am getting closer? When are they evaluating my progress?" No, He said, "Go."

B. Unattached And Ready To Move (v. 9-10)

I think the other thing he was unattached and ready to move as in verses 9 and 10. I love it.

"By faith he went to live in the land of promise,
as in a foreign land,
living in tents with Isaac and Jacob,
heirs with him of the same promise,
for he was looking forward to the city that had foundations,
whose designer and builder is God."

I just love the passionate mobility of Abraham. He is unattached and ready to go. Listen to me. Safety and security, and you have to know that at this stage in my life the older I get the more there is this temptation to be safe, to be secure, safety and security can become idols. I say this. I don't have energy like I used, to throw the spaghetti on the wall and whatever sticks to go with it. Some of you need to be shaking your head. Don't act like you ain't there. I know you are there, too. "I never had that experience." Liar. Safety and security can become idols. It can become idols. God was calling Abraham to move because he could have trusted his wealth. Abraham was a wealthy dude. He could have said, "No, wait, wait. God is not telling me. I have all of these relationships here. I have these resources here. We are settled here. Everybody knows me and God would not have given me this platform and this influence in my culture and tell me to move on. So, I will edit that. I can serve God right where I am. A lot of us would have done that. By the way, I hear that a lot. So you are left with the legacy of having controlled your life and having had nice family reunions and everybody was there together, but people die wondering what could have been and what should have been and what was leveraged for the kingdom I missed because I played it safe and I made mommy and daddy very happy by being here and being able to come over for every birthday. Abraham lived in tents because he had to be ready to move whenever God spoke. He had more of a passion to obey God than to build some type of family compound where everybody could come back to. His legacy was the obedience of God. His legacy and his heritage was God.

George Morrison said, "The important thing is not what we live in but what we look for." As followers of Christ we ought to be flexible and mobile, every last one of us, because God is writing His statement through your life during your moment in history. You can either play it safe and make assumptions about God and

make assumptions about your family, make assumptions about yourself, but there will be relatively little supernatural that you leave for succeeding generations.

2. WE OBEY GOD WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHEN GOD WILL FULFILL HIS PROMISE (11:11-12)

A. Odds Are Against Us (v. 11)

Secondly, we obey God when we don't know when God will fulfill His promise. That is in verses 11 and 12. Look at that.

“By faith Sara herself received power to conceive,
even when she was past the age,
since she considered him faithful who had promised.
Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead

That is cold-blooded. Man, could you say it more softly? Isn't that terrible? I mean the Bible is so straight, isn't it? Yo.

“were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven
and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

Now the passage that this is summarizing is too long so I am not going to go back there in Genesis 15 through chapter 21. This whole section is summarizing this --- Abraham going out, Abraham experiencing God and obeying Him even when he didn't know when God would fulfill His promises. The key text is Romans 4:16-21, which is Paul's summary of those chapters in Genesis. I will read it to you beginning at verse 16. He is really talking about the promise to Abraham and his seed. He says:

“That is why it depends on faith,
in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—
not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham,
who is the father of us all,
as it is written,
“I have made you the father of many nations”
—in the presence of the God in whom he believed,
who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against
hope, that he should become the father of many nations,
as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”
He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body,
which was as good as dead
(since he was about a hundred years old),
or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.
No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God,
but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,
fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”
(Romans 4:16-21 ESV)

This is absolutely remarkable. Abraham was not a young dude. Abraham and Sara had to wait 25 years for the fulfillment of a promise of a son – 25 years, 25 years - living a nomadic life. If you read the life of Abraham you know he went through a bunch of incredible nonsense through that knucklehead relative, Lot, of his. He just kept believing. He made some bad choices along the way.

Continuing to obey God day by day while we wait is one of the most difficult disciplines of life. I guess the advantage of me being at my age right now is that I can say that statement and not be theoretical. I have been there. I know what it means to wait on the Lord. I know what it means to be embarrassed because of an objective that I felt and a vision that I felt in my heart did not get fulfilled then. I know what that feels like. I want to tell you something. You will never make God work any faster than He wants to work. I don't care who you are. Yeah, okay, you have your MBA from Harvard and this kind of thing. God goes, "Oh, really? So, you are going to tell me that I need to make this happen by August 15, 2013, or else everything is belly up? No, I give life back to the dead, buddy." By the way it is not a good thing to dictate to God when He ought to work. I tried that. It don't [sic] work too good. True faith is able to wait for the fulfillment of God's purposes in God's time. That is true faith. Just keep believing God. You keep believing God. Just because something is not happening when you say you are believing God for it to happen does not mean that your faith is null and void. You just keep believing God. He is not a statement of your competence, and this is the problem where you have to get your flesh out of your faith. Be very careful of listening to others. I share this as a pastor. Be very careful of listening to some of these folks on TV where faith is what I call prostitution. They actually buy God off and have the inside track on some racehorse or something. That is not faith. You are not going to manipulate God through work. Real faith submits to the authority of the sovereign God of the universe and it responds to God's heart and intentions. It is deeper than me just getting what I want.

B. Time Is Running Out (v. 12)

One reason why God delayed in sending Abraham and Sara a son was to permit all of their natural strength to decline and then disappear. I want to give somebody hope here today. Some of you are sitting here right now and are so discouraged and you are at your wit's end. Things have not worked out and you have been praying and praying and praying and praying and it is a deadened, a dead-end, a dead-end. Things look worse since you started praying. They look worse since you started reading your Bible even more. They look worse since you got all of the sin out of your life. It is worse. Faith is really always about the glory of God however. Think about it. Abraham was 99 and Sara was 89 when Isaac was born. Reproductively both of them were dead. Faith says don't you dare tell God what you can or cannot do. Don't do that.

In fact, may I just bare my heart with you as a pastor? We need to run this church by good business practices. Proverbs is in the book and there are good business practices in the book of Proverbs. There ain't nothing [sic] not spiritual about that. It is in the book. The book of Nehemiah talks about planning, and there are all kinds of planning paradigms in the Bible, but we need to be very careful that we don't begin in the "name of good stewardship" to start telling God what He can and cannot do and when and if He can or cannot work. That is when the church ceases to become the dynamic household of the Spirit of God's operation and work in the world and to begin to become a corporation. If we learn anything from Abraham's life, God often brings us to the point of death so that before Him no flesh will glory. God is a God of resurrections and if you are in a dark situation right now, if things are going bleak in your life, don't give up, even if it looks dead. God is a God of resurrection. God can give life back to the dead! He can revive. He can change. Don't tell God what He can and cannot do and don't live that in front of your kids! Don't live in front of your kids such a hyper-controlled life that they get a view of Christianity that you can control and manipulate God. No, you can't. That is the reason why he waited. Abraham walked by faith and not by sight. He knew what God promises. He performs.

3. WE OBEY GOD WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHY GOD IS ASKING US TO DO THE EXCRUCIATING (11:17-19)

A. Painful Sacrifice (v. 17-18)

Now thirdly and finally we obey God when we don't know why God is asking us to do the excruciating. Let's go down to verses 17-19. Again:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac,
and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,
of whom it was said,
“Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”
He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which,
figuratively speaking,
he did receive him back.”

Well, this story of Isaac always tells us that God wants to bring life out of our dead situations. God wants to bring life out of our dead circumstances, no matter what they may be.

B. Supreme Trust (v. 19)

Verses 17 and 18 say there is a painful sacrifice that Abraham is called to make and then verse 19 tells us that there is a supreme trust that God wants him to make. For the sake of time I am not going to go into that, but I do want to land the plane by making five perspectives on faith and sacrifice that really come out of this last perspective. By the way, the writer of Hebrews is referring to Genesis chapters 22:1-14. This is a story of Abraham offering up his son, Isaac, God telling him to slay his son.

The point I want to make to us by the way is the issue here is “What won't you give up to obey God?” I didn't say what will you? That is an easier question to answer. The more honest question is, “What won't you give up to obey God?” The offering of Isaac forever stands as God's exclamation mark throughout time that you hold back nothing to obey God, that obedience to God is everything. There is never a reason to disobey God, never one. Now let me make five perspectives on faith and sacrifice based upon this reference. I will just click them off.

1. The tests of faith become more difficult as we walk with God. Anybody that tells you who has been a Christian for 10, 15, or 20 that the Christian life in terms of steps of faith gets easier is a liar. The truth of the matter is and the pattern in Scripture shows the more we walk with God the tests of faith become increasingly more difficult as we walk with Him. Here is the paradox: yet, the rewards are more wonderful. The rewards are more wonderful because on our way to doing something we become something, and we need tested.
2. It is one thing to trust God's word when we are waiting for something. It is quite another thing to trust and obey His word after it is received. That is really true. That is the reason why guys like me, and you pray for me as your senior pastor and all of us as leaders, (and what I am about to say to you might shock you) the biggest temptation that we experience, and I am speaking for just Crawford, the biggest temptation I experience believe it or not sounds like a weird paradox. Years ago when I was a young Christian leader, John Perkins warned me of something. We were talking about 25 or 30 years ago. He warned me of this. He said to me, “Crawford, your biggest struggle believe it or not will be when you get to be 50 or 60 years old and even though God has used you in a great way, there is this natural tendency with age to play it safe; and you are going to fall victim to the American mindset of retirement.” In other words, I paid my dues. I don't need to be doing that anymore. But there is never

a time, as God thinks in the reverse, there is never a time and we need to be crossing the finish line not believing God for less but believing Him for more. Amen? -- believing Him for more. I want to be 95 or 100 years old and maybe older than that so I can haunt my grandchildren. [I have to get going here; never mind].

3. There are tests of faith that defy logic and we want to resist. That is what this offering of Isaac teaches us. Now please do not believe the party line that God will never call you to do anything that is not logical, that is not reasonable. That is a lie. That is a lie. In fact, I think people who live like that suck the supernatural right out of their Christianity. God does call us to do things from time to time that don't even make sense. It does not even make sense. Why did I become a pastor at age 55? I share this with you. I had a lot of other options. Trust me I did. I could have chilled and wrote some books and done the radio. That was fine. Trust me, you have to be called to be a pastor. The first six months I was here I was saying, "God, did I hear you right?" You know, and you did, too. "Did we hear You right about him?" [laughter]
4. True faith holds nothing back from God but obediently gives him everything he asks, trusting Him to provide. True faith holds nothing back. This is my son. God, You gave me my son. By the way I want to tell you something here. Please listen to me. Please listen to me. Please, parents, hear me. Do not make your children idols. Don't do that. I know you love them and I would die for my kids. They are number one. Please don't do that. Please do not do that. You are setting yourself up for hurt and you are going to handicap your children's Christianity. When you lay them on the altar before God and you declare before God they are His, interesting, they love you more. My kids, I tell you, I just love them, but you have to stand back and you have to release them. Perhaps Isaac was getting a little too close to Abraham's heart and the Lord said offering him up.
5. Faith is always rewarding, always. It may not be what we think but God always rewards faith. Do you know what faith's message really is? I don't see this to sound like I am into some type of motivational speaking and self-determinism. Do you know what faith really says? Faith is probably the most liberating thing to experience because do you know what it says? Nobody controls my life but God. When you start exercising faith, it is amazing how it takes the fear of man off the table. What are they going to do to me? They don't have no hell to send me to. Thank God I would have been there many times. That is what Abraham learned. Really faith slays people pleasing. It really does. Faith is free. The only person who controls my life is Jesus. Everything else is negotiable.

Let's stand. Thank you for putting up with me. I have been a little long today, a little long, so [applause] but thank you for that. We had baptisms and other things. I don't want to apologize for this service. It was a wonderful time of interaction, but Fellowship can I just push you? I know faith is a journey and we all are growing in our faith, but can I just push you? Don't stop believing God for yourself. Don't stop believing God for your children. Don't stop believing God for this church. In fact, wherever a Christian is involved the greatest thing you can do if God has called you to be there is to give them the gift of faith, faith in Almighty God. I am incompetent. There are levels of incompetence and you all have seen it. I don't even try to hide it from you anymore but our God is never incompetent. He is trustworthy. He can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick, as my mama would say. He is almighty and we need to be among those people, and listen to me, don't you die, don't you die without having believed God. The only legacy we have is that we believe Him. The only legacy we have and I want to encourage all of you. There are dreams and visions here. Stop playing it safe. Would you stop that? -- stop being so self-protective. You have to believe Him. If He is telling you to do something and you know that He is, get it in gear and get after it. Suppose I fail? So what? You would rather die surging ahead than to drown in a crowded sea of apathy and complacency.

Father, thank You for the grace of God. Thank You for Your presence. Thank You for Your love. Thank You for the faith of Abraham. Thank You, oh God, that You have told us that faith is obedience. Lord, I pray that we will not be people who give great lip service to faith and great talks about plans and intentions and great insights about what we want to do next week or tomorrow but when You speak to us clearly it be said of us as it was of Abraham, "and Abraham went." Oh God, bless us today. Dismiss us with Your favor. In Jesus' name. Amen.