



Sermon

Faith comes by hearing God's Word

Hebrews 11:1, 8-12; Genesis 15:1-6

14th August 2022

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What is Faith? Today's readings provide three windows on faith. I am going to focus on the Hebrews passage with the story of Abraham.

You may remember the Indiana Jones movies possibly watching them with your children or grandchildren. Indiana Jones is an explorer who in this film is on the trail of the Holy Grail. He has a diary of his father's explorations which guides him to its hiding place and reveals the secret traps and obstacles protecting it.

There was a dramatic scene where Indiana has to cross a deep chasm. The notebook shows a bridge which does not appear to be there. Finally in great turmoil, he steps out into space and the bridge appears under his feet. He said that it was "leap of faith." Is that what God asks of us? No – God does not ask for a blind leap. Did you see in the film, that Indiana had the diary with instructions his father had written? That assured him that there was a bridge across the chasm. He had to trust what was written and act on it.

Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." [ESV] In other words, it is the words of Christ which are a good foundation for our lives. It is specific words or messages from him which build our faith and trust in him so that we can follow him where he calls us.

We trust written messages all the time. In 2018, I had an airline ticket for my flight back from Tanzania. That bit of paper was going to get me onto three different flights as we travelled from Dar Es Salaam to Abu Dhabi to Sydney to Auckland. But it was only a bit of paper. But that message was the proof that we had a booking and could get on those aircraft. If it had not been accepted, we would have been stuck in Dar Es Salaam in a very awkward situation. But we and the airline staff trusted it and we got home. We trust messages on paper all the time.

Hebrews 11 starts by defining faith: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

"Being sure of" is a translation of the Greek word, *hypostasis*. It is made up of *hypo* meaning under and *stasis* standing. It was used of the sediment in water, or the foundation. It then was used for conviction or confidence – that which you stand on.

Don't think this is an airy-fairy impractical idea. The next word I want to tell you about is *pragma*. It is the Greek word for deed, thing, matter – the origin of our word pragmatic. This faith business relates to deeds and actions and solid matters. So faith is the confidence of matters and deeds we are hoping for.

The second part of the definition is "Being sure of what we do not see." The "being sure" translates a word which is used of tested evidence and certainty. Do you hear the strength and the confidence in the definition? Foundation, conviction, confidence, tested evidence, certainty.



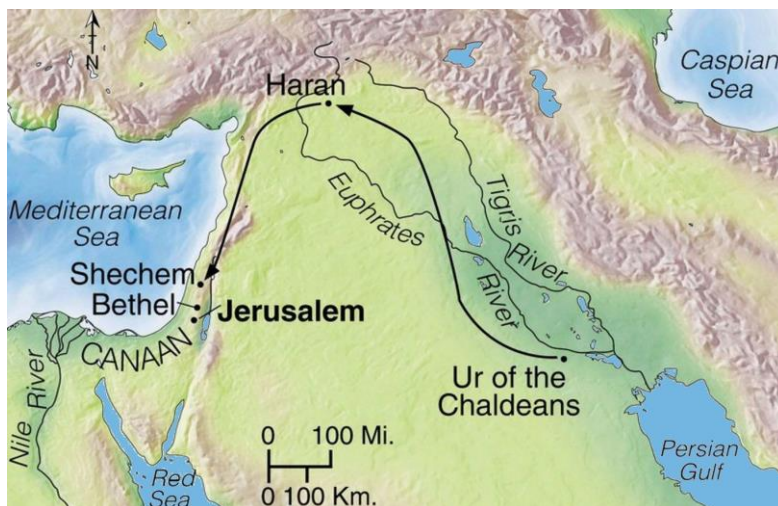
And remember this is not based on what we make up and want to believe. It is based on what God tells us – which we can trust. Faith is not a leap in the dark – **faith is a step into the light** of what God has told you and promised to you. It is about trust and obedience.

Our portion of Hebrews uses Abraham as an example. He was the son of Terah from Ur in the Chaldees in modern-day Iraq, south of Babylon. This was a sophisticated city. Abraham was a man of high culture. He had good standing, family and culture.

Then God called him to leave Ur and go to Canaan. Stephen tells us in his speech that the call first came in Ur. The family including Abraham’s father, Terah, moved as far as Haran which is on southern border of modern-day Turkey and stopped there.

Again, at Haran, God called Abraham to leave that land, his kindred, his father’s house and go the land he would show him – this was in Genesis 12. But it was not just a command there was a promise of becoming a great nation, being blessed and being a blessing.

So, at age 75, he left his society, his familiar way of life and wider family and went with his wife Sarah who was 65 and his nephew Lot and their servants on a journey somewhere!



He went south to Canaan still not knowing where God was sending him. At Shechem, the Lord appeared to him and promised that land to him and his descendants.

So, he and Lot stayed in the land in tents and their flocks and herds grew larger until there was a conflict between their herdsmen over grazing grounds. So, Abraham decided he and Lot had better go separate ways. Lot chose the West and Abraham accepted the East.

Here was another loss for Abraham – he would reasonably have expected that Lot would be his heir and now they had parted company. But immediately, God restated his promise to Abraham:

“All this land I give to you and your offspring. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.” [Gen 13:14]

There were two big issues for Abraham: land and offspring.

In Genesis 15 (our Old Testament passage), he complained to God about not having heir. God appeared to him saying, “I am your shield, your very great reward.” Again he promised a great multitude of descendants – as the stars of the sky. When God says he brought Abraham out to take possession of the land, Abraham is obviously feeling rather wobbly because he asks how he can know he will gain possession. And God goes through a formal covenant ceremony with him to assure him that he will have descendants and they will possess the land.

When Abraham is 85, Sarah decides that she can’t have a baby at 75 so it better come through her servant girl, Hagar, and they have Ishmael.

When Abraham was 99, God appeared to him again to reconfirm the covenant as recorded in Genesis 17. He promises again that the land is for him and his descendants and that Abraham will be the father of many nations. Now he promises Sarah will have a child and Ishmael will not be the heir.

In the next chapter, the Lord appeared again to Abraham in the visitation of the three angels. As part of the conversation, He says Sarah will have a child the next year. And in Genesis 21, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 years old, Isaac was born – the son of the promise.

Do you see how the word of the Lord to Abraham supported and encouraged him through his challenges and the long for fulfilment of the first promise?

He had to leave his country, his people, his culture - but he had a clear call and promise.

He lived as a stranger in Canaan in tents not in a city – but he had the promise of the land.


He lost the hope of Lot being his heir and it became naturally impossible for Sarah to bear a child – but God reiterated the promises of many descendants.

Repeatedly, God made covenant with him and repeated the promises to carry him through.

For us, the Bible has many general promises which are very good and generally applicable to us. God also speaks directly to us at times – perhaps applying a piece of scripture to our circumstance, perhaps speaking through a prophetic message or directly to us in some way. These give us courage and assurance to go forward and a foundation to build on.

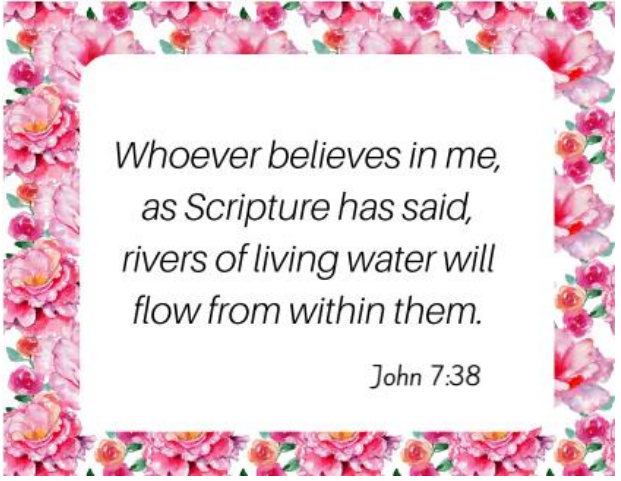
So, what promises has God spoken or highlighted to you? What sustains you? What would hold you if some foundation in your life were threatened, rocked or withdrawn? I hope you know some promises already. I have put some out on cards which may be helpful. You may like to look those over and see if any of them are particularly relevant to your life.

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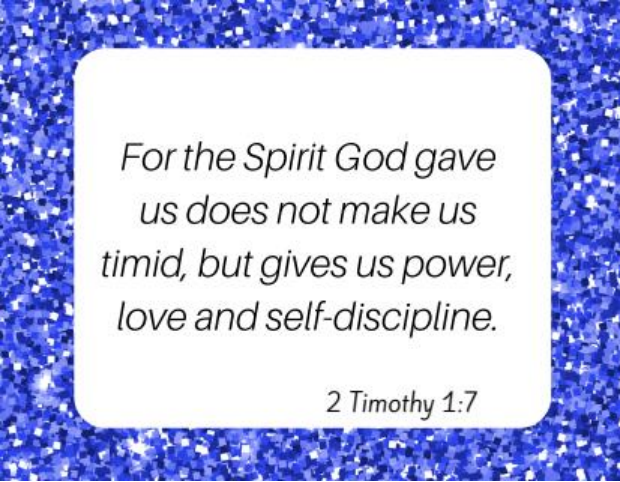
*Cast all your anxiety
on him because
he cares for you.*

1 Peter 5:7



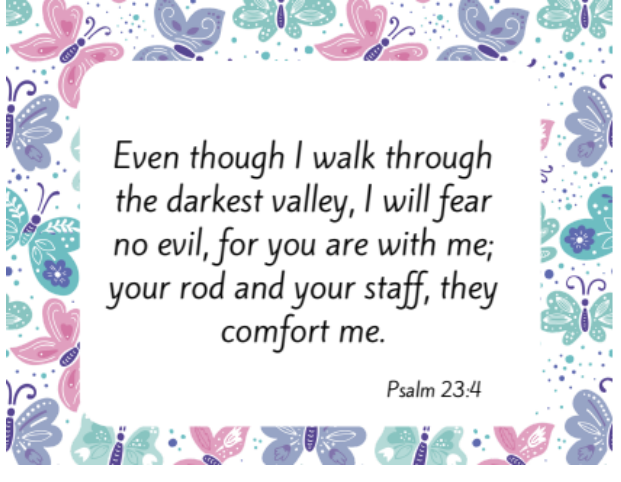
*Whoever believes in me,
as Scripture has said,
rivers of living water will
flow from within them.*

John 7:38




*For the Spirit God gave
us does not make us
timid, but gives us power,
love and self-discipline.*

2 Timothy 1:7




*Even though I walk through
the darkest valley, I will fear
no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they
comfort me.*

Psalm 23:4



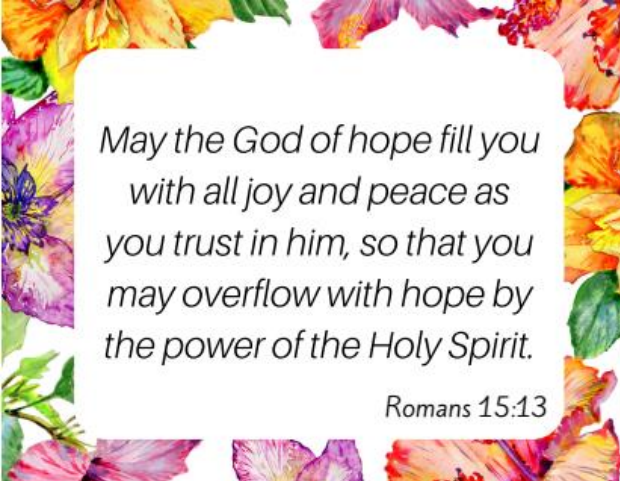
*The Lord is my light and my
salvation—whom shall I
fear? The Lord is the
stronghold of my life—of
whom shall I be afraid?*

Psalm 27:1




*You will keep in perfect
peace those whose minds
are steadfast, because they
trust in you.*

Isaiah 26:3



*May the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace as
you trust in him, so that you
may overflow with hope by
the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13



*The name of the Lord is a
strong tower; the righteous
run into it and are safe.*

Proverbs 18:10