

Faith And The Christian Fight (Part Nine)

Hebrews 11: A Success Formula

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I would like you to turn with me once again to Hebrews 11:13-14.

Hebrews 11:13-14 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

We are going to be continuing through Hebrews the 11th chapter because I feel it is so significant to our life in this time. In fact the entire book of Hebrews is, because those people were headed for an end, as it were, of a culture. What they were going through, and what was happening in the lives of those people, is a very important parallel to what many of us are going through at this time.

Did you ever think about how long Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob served God during the time of their conversion as compared to the length of time that *you* have served God during *your* conversion? They not only served Him for a long time, but at least two of them did so in very stressful times.

Enoch not only served God in what appears to have been a very long time, but some of his life was so stressful that his life was in danger; so much danger that God transported him to another area of Earth so that he would not be killed.

Noah served God at least 125 years, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it was actually longer than that. It was at least 125 years while building the ark, and during times that were so stressful that the "time of the end" is compared to the times that he lived through and built that ark.

Abraham and Sarah's life was not so tumultuous, but Abraham's time of service was still 100 years. Nobody in this period of time that we are living in is even going to come close to the period of conversion of Abraham. I am sure that even those times not described in scripture were still crammed with faith-testing adventures. Jacob's trial of faith was also quite long, and Isaac's testing may have been even longer than Abraham's. Verses 13 and 14 are a common basis from God for their having done so.

Our time of testing will not be so lengthy, but it is becoming ever more obvious that the intensity of the stresses is rising. We are faced with Jesus' sobering statement in Matthew 24:13 that it is those "who endure to the end" who will be saved. Our love for God is being tested, and it will be tested more severely.

I Corinthians 13:7 is an encouraging reminder that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and *endures* all things. The love that does is the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love expresses itself consistently and actively. However, this love requires a foundation under it to support it and sustain it, and the foundation is faith in God—faith in the God that we serve.

Our reliance in the use of this gift of faith from God is not perfectly consistent. There are factors that work in each of us that cause it to ebb and to flow in intensity, depending upon the circumstances. Brethren, it can even be lost, but it never *should* be lost. There is a big difference between those two. God has not called us to fail. He did not give us repentance, He did not give us the gift of faith, He did not give us the Spirit, in order that we might fail. We *can* fail, but we should not. He has every confidence with Him working in our lives that we can succeed, even though the times are difficult and sometimes the hardship is great.

I want you to turn to the Old Testament, to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. These are very familiar scriptures. Many of you know a song that uses these scriptures.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a

time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

One of the things we can learn from Solomon's listing of these generalities is that everyone's life consists of basically the same event. This is universal. It matters not whether you are a Chinese, a Japanese, a Brazilian, a Zambian, or whatever. These generalities are going to hit everyone's life, and so we can expect that they will apply to us. We should expect that these major events that are given here will occur.

However, there is a catch. They are not always experienced in a nice orderly sequence. Sometimes two or three of them hit us at the same time; some good, some bad. We cannot depend upon a schedule of arrival, so we cannot organize a systematic plan, saying, "Well, this is going to happen to me this month, and this is going to happen to me next month, so I will take care of this right now, and will get prepared for the next thing that is coming up." Some of that should be done, but as we are going to see, we are not completely in charge of our lives, are we? So we cannot always say, "This week I am going to throw away, because next week I am going to gather in."

We would all like to have that foresight and the power to control what is going on in our life, but the reality is that there is very much impacting on us over which we have absolutely no control. For example, we cannot control the weather, and yet it impacts on all of us. We cannot control the economy, and yet it impacts on all of us. We cannot control the politics of this nation, and yet it impacts on all of us. We cannot make the stock market go up and down, and yet it is impacting on us maybe ever so slightly in some cases, but it is there and there is an influence from it.

Events are now happening at an accelerated pace and life can easily become an uncontrollable jumble. Future shock is arising as a palpable force. It is the stress of that wearing away at you that is noticeably significant. If we fit

chapter 3 into the whole of all twelve chapters of the book that all of these things must be met by us with a deeply understood belief that God is sovereign and that man is to take life day by day as if from the hand of God, we realize that God has a fitting time for each to be done, and therefore we should not be caught completely by surprise.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15 What profit has he that works in that wherein he labors? I have seen the travail, which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He has made every thing beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God does it, that men should fear before him. That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God requires that which is past.

Let me give you just a little overview of this. The significance of the closing verses of this chapter is that Solomon is showing that man is responsible to discern the right time for the right action, and when he does the right action, according to God's time, the result is beautiful, wonderful, enjoyable, and rewarding. But Solomon also cautions us that even though God has put a desire in us to *know*, and to understand thoroughly—(This is where He put eternity into our heart.)—we will never reach that point. We lack the mind. We lack the control. But if we meet each event understanding something, then the most can be made for it.

Again, when this is seen in the context of the whole book, this accentuates the need for faith in God. What did he say at the end of the book? The conclusion is this: It is the duty of man to keep God's commands regardless of the circumstances that are at work in his life. We keep His commands knowing that God *is* in control. Brethren, He is involved in my life and in your life. Do you get it?

These uncontrollable events should not disturb us in the same way that they would disturb those who have no thought of God in their life. They believe that God exists, but He is really not an active part of their life. They are not praying to Him without ceasing and are not studying into His word, and so the events of life will have a far different impact on them than it does on those whose lives, whose belief, whose understanding, whose faith accentuates the fact that God *is* involved in *our* life. Then the events of life can be turned in the right direction; not completely, but at least to a limited extent.

We ought to make the best use we can within God's purpose of each day that God gives to us, enjoying what we have while accepting the undeniable fact that there is very much beyond our control. The point is that God is on His throne and He knows what He is doing. Do we believe it, and do we show that belief by the way we adapt to these events that occur to us? What Solomon is expounding here is an act of faith in God's sovereignty.

The people referred to in Hebrews 11:12-13 are admirable, in that despite of the length of their service and the difficulty of their trials through faith, hope, and love, they permitted God to see them through. Verses 12 and 13 give us a general overview of how they did it. They persevered, believing in the reality of God and the promises that came from His lips. It is thus the durability and the constancy of their faith that is commended by those two verses.

Genesis shows us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had assaults of temptations from the world around them to abandon their faith. There were times when their faith, hope, and love were at a low ebb, and they attempted some kind of carnal solution during their trial, like producing an heir through a proxy. Who did that? You know who did that. Or going into Egypt. Ah! That was the solution. Who did that? Both the father and the son did that. Or used a deceptive lie to save their skin, or using some sneaky scheme to get the best of a deal with an equally conniving relative—Jacob and Laban. But over the long span of their lives, they persisted in trusting God, and actually did very well; so much so that they who both lived and died in the faith are commended by God Himself.

The beginning phrase in verse 13 says "these all died in faith." That phrase very likely includes all the heroes of faith mentioned in the course of the entire chapter, not just the names of those that preceded that verse.

The Bible's presentation of the lives of its personalities like Noah and Abraham is given in something similar to, or we will say, the equivalent of the term "sound bites," as we would call them today. The stories of their triumphs and failures of faith are given really in short bursts. We are given a brief look into an event that may have taken a long period of time to actually unfold in real time.

Their lives, like ours, were filled with the routine and the mundane activities of daily life, like the plowing and the planting, the harvesting, the mending of clothing, the preparation of meals, the instruction and cleaning of children, the working through of sicknesses, enduring hard times, the droughts and the floods, and all the enjoyment of births and weddings.

They lacked the immediacy of radio and television and telephones to provide information on events of the community, or even from halfway around the world, like we have. They did not have the ever-present availability of distracting entertainment, of automobiles to do whatever shopping needed to be done on the spur of the moment. But can we be sure, brethren, and be right in this, that they did have their equivalence of those things, and that each one of these people lived his life within the rhythm of their time even as we do today? I think one of the things we need to get over is that their lives were slow.

Do you think you know enough about God that He would never allow them to get slow? They had pressure put on them. That is one of God's patterns. I have come to the conclusion that theirs was every bit as busy as ours because God was part of their lives, and was busily creating, and their lives were equally intense, but doing different things; thus they had boring periods when it seems as though nothing was happening. Then they also had periods when it seemed like nothing was under control, and everything was happening all at once, and they had to make choices sometimes on the spur of the moment. There were times, I am sure, when they felt that their whole life and the whole world was falling apart, and they were having a difficult time adjusting to it.

I want you to notice the rest of verse 13 of Hebrews 11, because it goes on from where we had already read to, by saying, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." I am sure that "not having received the promises" was very likely a point of discouragement to them quite a number of times. They went through their long period of trial and testing and never experienced the return of Jesus Christ. They were never changed. They never inherited the kingdom.

There is no doubt that they received many blessings during their lifetime. For example, Abraham and Sarah received Isaac, but they never received the promises' fulfillment. But along with the blessings there were undoubtedly periods of anxiety and disappointment.

Perhaps what happened to Moses will help us to more fully understand what the author of Hebrews had in mind. You see, Moses only got to *see* the Promised Land from afar. Is that not true? He could not go in at the time. Have you ever looked at that situation more carefully? I did not until today. In fact until this morning.

I want you to go with me back to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 3. I want to remind you that the book of Deuteronomy was written in the last month of Moses' life.

Deuteronomy 3:1 Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.

This verse sets the time element for this chapter. These events of this chapter occurred just as Israel began its final push to begin taking over the Promised Land. In other words, it was right near the end of the forty years in the wilderness. Now I want you to go to verse 21. Verse 1 set the time element.

Deuteronomy 3:21-23 And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms where you pass. You shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you. And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, . . .

In verse 23, the words "at that time" were in the last month of the end of the forty years period.

Deuteronomy 3:23-28 And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou have begun to show your servant your greatness, and your mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to your works, and according to your might? I pray you, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice you; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get you up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up your eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with your eyes: for you shall not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you shall see.

Again, the section we are on is "not having received the promises." He was using Moses as a very interesting, significant example. We see here that Moses pleaded *strongly* with God to give him this blessing. "Please, God. Please. Let me see the land from the ground itself." He did it so strongly and persistently that the first phrase of verse 26 tells us two things. God got angry at Moses with his persistent appealing to Him, basically telling him to "shut up."

It goes on to show you something else. It also says, "The LORD was angry with me for *your* sakes." The marginal reference says "on account of *you*." What I am saying to you is that Moses was going to bear what we will call a punishment, not on his own account; maybe he was partly to blame, but Israel was very largely to blame for why Moses got into that circumstance.

I want you to think back on what Moses could look back upon: a birth, and then the sustaining of his life through rescue by a princess who was a daughter of Pharaoh—a miraculous event done even before he was aware of what was going on. Later on, after that occurred, he could look back and say, "Hey! God Himself intervened in my life," and thus, because of God's

intervention, he grew up receiving the best education that his day could afford. He was instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt. Then he had to flee Egypt at about 40 years of age in order to preserve his life.

What a comedown! And so he spent 40 years shepherding sheep, marrying Ziporah, having two sons, and all the while being humbled and otherwise prepared to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Following that were 40 more years—tumultuous years—in the wilderness, leading Israel to the Promised Land. He could undoubtedly see God's involvement virtually every step of the way. But here he was, right on the doorstep, and the last step into the land was denied. That could have been a devastating event. This no doubt affected him, and yet even with somebody as close to God as Moses was, God shut the door. You see, God is still sovereign. Moses had to accept that this was a blessing he was going to be denied. I am sure he repented and accepted it in a very good attitude.

Now what kept these heroes of faith, going over such long periods of time, doing things in very good, maybe even supreme fashion? First, they humbly accepted that inheriting the promises was one of those events that were completely out of their control. So a question for us is: Have *we* accepted that? Have we truly given control of our life over to God?

When God revealed the promises to them, just as with us, no specific time was established to receive them. We know an end is coming, and *they* knew an end was coming, and they had to live "from then to then" without knowing when that end would be. But God revealed enough of His plan so that they knew that a number of things had to be accomplished, and that this would require time. I am sure they were ever hopeful that God would put together the whole package before they died. That is a very natural human hope, and it is not a bad one as long as we do not let it get control of us and we get into a bad attitude because things keep going on.

Let us jump ahead in time and thought to Paul's day.

Romans 13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Paul shows in II Thessalonians 2 that he knew certain events had to occur before Christ returned. He shows there that he knew good and well that they had not yet occurred at the time he wrote that epistle. Time went on and on, and Paul died. So he died in faith too, not having received the promises. Can we bear that—that we, too, might die without having received the promises? Yet God has treated us just as fairly as He did with them. We see that an end is coming. They saw that an end was coming. The end did not happen then, and so we have to live knowing that the end may not come in our life, but to live ever hopeful and not allow it to get such a stressful mode of thinking that it discourages us right out of the church because it has not come.

Maybe we will be just like Moses. God had to put him through one more stressful situation that he had to accept and not turn away from God. What a thing to be right on the edge of the end, and then be denied. Moses was quite a man. He could have gotten into a real hissy-fit, but he did not. He almost did. He really appealed, but he got control of himself.

Paul understood that certain things had to occur. He did not see that they were occurring, and so his writing, as in I Thessalonians 4, is filled with hope, but yet not enough, you see, to say it is going to happen in our lifetime. He left the door open.

Brethren, even Jesus did not know the exact time. We have not been denied what Christ was given because He was not given the entire picture in all its detail either. But, brethren, here is one of God's patterns that we have to live with. There are enough of these to remind us that God is sovereign over the purpose He is working out, and He has deemed it wise to strongly veil the prophecy for His purposes, and then nobody is burdened with knowing. Do you think that would not be a burden? Oh brethren, it would be a burden, and we would probably "blow it" if we knew.

Everybody that God has called has had to live by faith, having his anxieties, impatience, and weariness with the circumstance in which they are living and are being thoroughly tested. Sometimes people go off half crocked about prophecy, and especially about the place of safety. When will they ever learn that nobody has been right yet?

Prophecy is indeed a part of God's word, but it is a deeply veiled part, and it will not be known until God is good and ready and we absolutely need to know for our spiritual well-being. Prophecy has been compared to sugar, or to a dessert; and as dessert is to the body, so prophecy is to the mind. Both are stimulating in their place, but when all is said and done, neither feeds or strengthens, except temporarily. Each gives an initial burst of energy, but after the burst there is a discouraging let-down.

So many times I think people spend all their time searching into prophecy either out of a fear of death, or that pride is driving them so that they will be the first to know and have the acclaim that comes from others by revealing it to them. But do not ever let this get too far from you. In Revelation 2 and 3, in Christ's letters to the churches, He shows very plainly and clearly that salvation and the reward goes to those who overcome; not to those who know the most, or were stimulated the most by prophecy. So it is there. Study into it, but do not ever let it get control of you. It makes me wonder how many people will be unprepared when death comes because they spent so much time pursuing prophecy. We cannot allow this to become unbalanced.

The next thing that Hebrews 11:13 says is, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them." Abraham is a good example of this. Romans 4:21 says, "After being fully persuaded that what He [God] had promised, He was able also to perform." What this means within the context of Hebrews 11, is that they did not stubbornly fight God's word with a cynical skepticism. They did not hesitate. They did not dilly-dally and hem-and-haw and meditate on what He said, but they readily acquiesced in the face of His truthfulness. This provides us with guidance of what a humble, yielding, childlike acceptance is like.

We do these people a disservice in our evaluation of them and turn them into mere automatons if we do not allow them to have periods of doubt and distrust of God. They, too, were assaulted with questions about God as to the way He was doing things that they had no quick and easy answers for. But still, nonetheless, they persevered. I want to show you an example of how they did it.

Mark 9:24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help you my unbelief.

This man faced the same situation within himself. He had a certain level of belief, but he was honest enough that he knew that this level was not deep enough or strong enough, but he knew where to go to have more. This is the kind of searching faith that will grow into strong conviction. What this man did is that he asked first of all for the healing of his child. He was very pleased when Christ said what He did.

Christ asked him, "Do you believe?" "Do you have faith?" The man said, "Yes, I have faith," but he also knew he did not have anywhere near enough. There was a humility there that Jesus responded to. So that man's level of belief was there just as it is within us, but we have to do what this man did, and that is to take steps by going to the One who can give the faith, who gave the faith in the first place, and then would give more to continually grow so that when we are assaulted by questions regarding what we are going through in our life, we will be able to meet those things. This is the kind of searching faith that will grow into strong conviction.

Again, this indicates that despite times of depression and doubt, the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 were supported by a consistently yielding childlike acceptance and willingness-to-be-guided attitude. This leads right to the logical next step in Hebrews 11:13: "they were persuaded of them [of the promises], and embraced them."

The underlying Greek word for the word "embrace" is used only one other time in the New Testament, and this is the occasion in Acts 20:1 when Paul was saying goodbye to the elders in the Ephesian church following the uproar that was caused there by the man named Demetrius who felt that Paul was cutting into his profits by teaching Jesus Christ. Paul was saying goodbye to these people, and he probably knew in the back of his mind that it might be that he would never see these people again, and so it was a tearful goodbye he was saying to them, and they hugged one another.

The underlying Greek word in the English word "embrace" means exactly the same thing. It means "to enfold *to* one's self, and thus to hug; to adopt, to encircle, to accept and to espouse." There is within the word a sense of

personal and possessive intimacy attached to the word, and it is even used at times in Greek writing to suggest sexual intimacy.

Now Paul does not suggest sexual intimacy here in Hebrews 11, but he is nonetheless telling us that these people did not merely intellectually believe, but they made the promises of God their personal God-given possession. This term indicates that they held the promises as personally precious as one would a child or a spouse that one would pull into one's self. It is showing that there was nothing stand-offish about their faith. They drew the promises into themselves and they became an abiding part of them, giving direction to their life.

The *Amplified Bible* translates the first phrase of Hebrews 11:13 as, "These people all died, controlled and sustained by their faith." That translation gives a great deal of insight because it is telling us that the promises of God *held* them on a steady course, and at the same time provided the course and the goal for their lives.

The last phrase gives us the evidence, the proof, of this when it says, "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth." Their confession is given in the way they lived their lives. The confession had nothing to do with admitting guilt or crime. It had everything to do with the conduct of their life. In short, they consistently submitted to God.

We have reached now a critical important point as to why these people did what they did. A person will devote his entire life to achieving some object as these people did, only because achieving it is personally important and very valuable. The word "precious" might be the best word to describe it.

We are going to go to Psalm 119. Notice what the psalmist said.

Psalm 119:14 I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches.

Psalm 119:160-162 Your word is true from the beginning: and every one of your righteous judgments endures for ever. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart stands in awe of your word. I rejoice at *your* word, as one that finds great spoil.

These words are really significant and meaningful to you and me, because these declarations by the psalmist reveal an emotional attachment to the factual logic of God's existence and His word containing His promises. The psalmist is telling us that he found the same joyful satisfaction in God's word that others derive from their pursuit of and accumulation of wealth. Brethren, God's word was his treasure.

Psalm 119:49 Remember the word unto your servant, upon which you have caused me to hope.

This prayerful appeal becomes more meaningful when we understand that the Hebrew word translated as "word" in this verse can also be translated "promise." The psalmist is telling us that he found the same joyful satisfaction in God's word that others derive from their pursuit and accumulation of wealth. They were his treasure.

The psalmist is probably thinking of a specific promise, but the statement is true that God's word of promise gives hope to our lives. They give an emotional quality that bolsters sheer belief. So then we have to ask ourselves, what influence do God's promises have on the way we personally live our lives, and most especially in times of trial? Do they supply us with more comfort than the dearest things of this world?

We are going to see a couple more emotionally, powerful declarations Paul makes, first one that he makes concerning the influence of God's promises on him, and of course on the people to whom he was writing.

II Corinthians 4:1-2 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not [we do not give up]; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

First of all he makes the statement regarding the way that he lived his life. Of course he was including these people within his own personal testimony as though they too were living the same way.

Verse 7 is one of the most humbling verses in all of the Bible, if we will just allow it to rattle around in there, and embrace it and pull it into ourselves.

II Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Paul was humbled by what he understood of God's word, and he says, "Here I am, just a walking bag of bones and flesh and clay, and I have this knowledge within me!" And it humbled him. Do you think he did not embrace them? Oh boy, he sure did! It *drove* him, because they were so important to his life.

II Corinthians 4:8-9 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Listen to what he is saying, not only about himself, but about the Christians in the first century as well, because he draws them within this word-picture.

II Corinthians 4:10-11 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in *our* body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in *our* mortal flesh.

Are you beginning to see what guided, drove, and controlled the way that the heroes of faith and the heroes of Hebrews 11 had in them? They *embraced* the word of God as something precious to them.

II Corinthians 4:12-18 So then death works in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which

cause we faint not [We do not give up.]; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The heroes of faith saw things afar off, and yet they never received them. They made overwhelming numbers of moral and spiritual choices in their lives because of them, despite the fact that many of those choices were made at the cost of something that was very dear to them, and they made the sacrifice. Has anybody taken this with such intensity as Abraham? It is pretty hard to come up with something equal to that, because he would have far rather given up his life than Isaac's.

There is an interesting thing that occurs in the writings of Peter. It is kind of unique to him, and that is the way of the number of times he used the word "precious." I want you to turn to II Peter 1:1-2.

II Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like **precious** faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter had a liking for the word "precious." Precious is not truly a specific word. It only indicates that something is personally held to be valuable. In his brief epistle he uses it seven times. That is more than any other New Testament writer. We are going to follow his most obvious usage—something that is interesting and is helpful to our faith. We are going to go now to I Peter 1.

I Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more **precious** than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

I Peter 1:19 But with the **precious** blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

I Peter 2:4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and **precious**,

I Peter 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, **precious**: and he that believes on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is **precious**: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner.

II Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and **precious** promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Now if we would put them all together there is a common thought that runs through all of these verses, and it is that what Peter held to be precious is in reality a *person*. In some cases it is very obvious—the precious blood of Christ. So what he held as precious is in reality Jesus Christ.

I am going to read verse 1 again of II Peter 1.

II Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

In any number of translations, for example *The American Standard*, *The Philips*, *The Revised English Bible*, the word "through" in the phrase "faith with us through," that word "through" is changed to the word "in." *The New American Standard* gives the change as an alternative, and it draws us to the margin where it says "in." I am going to give you how the *Philips Bible* renders this verse. Listen to it in modern English.

II Peter 1:1 (*The New Testament in Modern English*) Simon Peter, a servant and messenger of Jesus Christ sends this letter to those who have been given a faith as valuable as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The change from "through" to "in" does not mean that the *King James Version* is wrong, because either word is correct, and a good argument can be made to retain the "through" translation. However, I believe that greater impact on faith is trust. Faith can be a mere belief, but in action faith is trust, so faith as trust is attained by the word "in." This may seem insignificant, but what this change does is alter the focus of the Christian's precious God-given faith object; that is, what the faith is aimed toward—from faith in a thing (that is, a body of doctrine) to faith in a *Being*—a very *precious* Being.

Just in case you do not think that is important, stay tuned.

Now here is a reality. Faith in what a person says is only as strong as faith in who says it. This is where it is significant. In other words, that little preposition "in" goes straight to the heart of one's trust. *Who said it?* That is what is important. Who said it? It is then, and only then that what the person said really matters in terms of saving faith, especially when one might consider that one's life is on the line. It is the precious value of the person saying it that makes what the person says also precious, and in addition gives a positive and strong emotional "I want to possess this quality" to what is said. In this case, what *is* said is the promises.

Let us jump ahead to Hebrews 11, from verse 13 to verses 24 through 26.

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming [valuing, treasuring] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

Do you catch it? Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ more precious than the riches of Egypt. Christ did not literally appear until 1400 years after Moses, but Moses understood who it was he was dealing with, and so did

Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Samuel, and David, and Ezra and Nehemiah. That is who they treasured! When He spoke, they listened! Then *what* He said became as valuable to them as the One who said it. It could be relied upon. Anybody can say anything. Is that not true? It is when we hear who said it that it either loses its value, or it becomes very precious.

They knew who they were dealing with! It was their Creator. They believed Him. They were persuaded, and they embraced Him and His promises. Brethren, that is how they survived one hundred years or more of conversion. That is how they overcame the times that they lived in. That was their staff and their stay that enabled them to persevere despite the busy-ness and the stress of what they were going through. It was their faith in the One who said what He did, and so His promises were as precious to them as He was, as valuable as treasure.

Turn with me to John 17. Jesus is speaking.

John 17:2-3 As you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Can you understand a bit better why Jesus said what He did here? We have a relationship with a living person, and we must come to know *Him* better and better. It is not only a relationship with a mere body of beliefs, as important and as true as they are. Hearing a promise from someone we do not know very well—someone we know only casually—may seem attractive for a while and motivate us to pursue the promise for a period of time, but the initially attractive appeal of the promise will not support one for very long unless the relationship with the promise gives them the opportunity to grow in that direction.

Psalms 111:1-10 Praise you the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious: and his righteousness endures for ever. He has made his

wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He has given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant. He has showed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He sent redemption unto his people: he has commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endures for ever.

Notice especially verses 2 and 4. In verse 2, He tells us that His works are sought out, meaning that those who know Him will be studying into those, and they will take pleasure in them. And then in verse 4 He specifically tells us that God does His works so that they will be remembered. Why does He want them to be remembered? It is because they will influence those who study into them to make right choices.

When it says that those people in Hebrews 11 embraced His words, and when it says they were persuaded of them, that is what they did. They knew the One they were dealing with, and they thought about His works. They studied on what God is like and what He did, and they just drew on those things until they became part of themselves.

So we can begin to understand that it is those who diligently seek Him out, those who pray without ceasing, those who study into His word to learn more about Him, those who meditate upon the importance of the relationship to link things together in the right way, those who submit to what they learn. Those are the ones who will persevere because they *know* Him. Their knowing of Him becomes evermore precise, and their studying into Him glorifies Him, magnifies Him to greater and greater intensity.

What we are seeing in Hebrews 11:13 is another one of the Bible's formulas for success. The formula begins with one first perceiving in God's promises something of intrinsic value, and the central value leads them to be persuaded that the value is good and right. The patriarchs then thoroughly embraced them, drawing them to themselves, making them a part of every

moment of their lives, thus allowing them to be strongly influenced to make right choices; and thus they lived by them. This is what led them to giving witness by their everyday actions that they were strangers and pilgrims, separate from those around them. It was these factors that sanctified them from the world, and they truly walked to the beat of a different drummer. Their conduct made it clear that their citizenship and inheritance was elsewhere.

I think that is a good place to stop. I am going to give you one more scripture. It is John 4, verses 4 through 28, and John 4, verses 41 and 42. I want you to think about that and guess one little lesson that is in that big vignette that Christ gives there.

John 4:4-28 And he must needs go through Samaria. Then comes he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus said unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then said the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water. The woman said unto him, Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then have you that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman said unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus said unto her, Go, call your husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, You have well said, I have no husband: For you have had five husbands; and he whom you now

have is not your husband: in that said you truly. The woman said unto him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The woman said unto him, I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said unto her, I that speak unto you am he. And upon this came his disciples, and marveled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seek you? or, Why talk you with her? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and said to the men, . . .

John 4:41-42 And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.