

## Baby Steps September 11, 2022

\*\*\*\*

My name is Jonathan Cordle and I'm one of the pastors at Crossroads. Today we're going to talk about a spiritual truth that can be applied to a life of faith in Jesus. Don't become consumed with figuring out every uncertainty. Just take the next step of faith. Baby steps! In other words, walking with God happens one step at a time.

This is an easy thing to say, but hard to do. Why? For one, walking goes at a slow pace. You can't rush walking. If you speed it up, it's not walking anymore, it's something else. This slower pace goes against our grain as we live in an age of instant results. Case in point, I get upset any time I order something online and it takes more than 2 days for the package to arrive! Another thing about walking is there is a rhythm to it. It's steady and consistent. There's the problem- I can be incredibly inconsistent in how diligent I am in walking by faith because Jesus doesn't always take us down the easiest path! One of my favorite hymns, *Come Thou Fount*, features the line "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love."

We can become paralyzed, crippled by fear and unable to function spiritually. The good news is that God the Father sent Jesus to show us what it looks like to walk with God every step of the way. We're not facing anything that Jesus hasn't faced! When we live in step with God's Spirit, we can follow in Jesus' path as we walk by faith.

Let's go to Hebrews 11, a chapter of the Bible that illustrates how faith works. We don't know who the author of Hebrews is, but it's a pastoral letter written to Jewish followers of Jesus who were facing terrible persecution. People were being jailed and killed for their faith which means many of them were exhausted and didn't know how to keep going. The author encourages them to persevere and continue to take steps of faith.

**11:1 Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.**

This verse is dense with insight about what faith is, which is helpful since we can import some assumptions about the word "faith." We might associate faith with something that mainly happens in our head. If we say someone is a "person of faith," we can understand that to mean they have a set of beliefs, as if faith is a checklist of statements we agree or disagree with. Other times, faith could be associated with something we feel deeply in our heart we want to be true, as if we need to hype ourselves up to have faith. But in Hebrews 11:1, faith doesn't stay confined in our heads. Nor is it wishful thinking. "**Faith shows the reality of what we hope for...**" Does this sound like something that is just about what we think or feel? No, it says *faith shows...* it is active. We can see it being lived out. That's why the description of "walking" is so helpful when it comes to faith- we don't just *think* about taking steps- we actually do it! Faith may start in our head or heart, but it becomes fully formed when it shows up in what we do.

Dr. Tony Evans says it well: Faith isn't merely *feeling* like God is telling the truth, nor is it *saying* God is telling the truth. For faith to truly be faith, it involves *acting* like God is telling the truth. That's why the Bible calls it *walking* by faith, not talking by faith or even feeling by faith. After talking about what faith is, Pastor Evans reminds us that we are not the first ones to walk down this path. Hebrews 11 cites dozens of heroes of faith, including the story of Abraham and Sarah: <sup>8</sup> **It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.**

Fun story! God comes to Abraham and says, "I want you to uproot the life you've built and go to a new land. I'm not going to tell you where it is, but I'll make sure to let you know when you arrive." He picked up everything he had and left- Abraham acted in faith! When God called him, Abraham had a decision to make- do I take this step or not? This is the same decision that you and I are called to make every day. My wife and I love going on walks together, especially on trails. On one recent excursion, the trail in front of us was blocked because a giant tree had fallen right in the path we were to take. We had a choice- do we try to overcome this obstacle and keep going, or turn back? We're going to come across some obstacles on the path of our faith journey. We'll be faced with decisions to stop or keep going. One of those that Abraham faced was that of insecurity and discomfort.

## **Obstacles to Walking by Faith**

### **Insecurity and Discomfort**

It's not easy to leave the life you've built for yourself, but for Abraham this meant losing his security and protection, which were not easy to come by in his day. It also meant the loss of comfort as they began new lives as nomads. It took faith for him to continue to live this way. <sup>9</sup> **And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise.** Instead of living out his retirement years in comfort, Abraham took the family on a never ending camping trip! Who could've blame him if he decided, "God, if you're going to provide this land, go ahead and show it to me first, and then I'll move!" But then Abraham wouldn't be walking by faith, he'd be walking by sight. This is what it meant to walk by faith for Abraham! Why did he do it?

<sup>10</sup> **Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.** Abraham believed that God was building an eternal destination and his actions showed his faith! Faith happens when we respond to God with our "yes" and with each step we take, God uses your yes for His purposes. The audience hearing this would certainly identify with the loss of security and comfort. Imagine showing up in worship every week, but some of the people you're used to seeing aren't there anymore because they'd been killed or thrown in jail. Their faith meant discomfort! Most of us are not in danger of being arrested or killed for our faith. However, we're always going to be challenged to live counter to our tendencies for self-preservation and accumulation. For instance, the practice of tithing, giving a tenth of your income, demonstrates a trust in God's provision. Our giving mirrors God's generosity and cultivates an outlook of abundance. While it might initially challenge our

impulse for security, it helps us to become secure in God's care for us. We're also called by God to be ambassadors of reconciliation. That means that we're willing to have uncomfortable conversations with others when there's conflict. Rather than running away, we lean in. This applies to cross cultural relationships, politics, workplace disputes, and more. How do you respond when God calls you to take a step into an area that may make you feel insecure or uncomfortable?

**Another obstacle we see from this scripture is...**

### **Uncertainty and Impatience**

This shows up through the story of Abraham and Sarah trying to conceive a child. God promised that it would happen, but it ended up taking 25 years until it was fulfilled. That's a long time to wait! **<sup>11</sup> It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise.** If you know the story, Sarah and Abraham weren't entirely faithful in waiting for this promised child to be born. Abraham conceived a child with their servant girl because they were trying to take control of the situation. Sarah even scoffed when God reiterated His promise. Her impatience morphed into cynicism. Yet, God was true to His word, even as Abraham and Sarah strayed. He could even use their fickle faith because what little faith they had, they acted on. The audience of Hebrews persevered with the hope that Jesus was coming to right every wrong. Through their faith, God grew the church, even in the most unlikely of circumstances! Ultimately, the audience of Hebrews died living in this hope, which is a trait they shared with their predecessors of the faith. **<sup>13</sup> All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.** They were in it for the long haul. Rather than recalibrating their location for earthly gain or possessions, they stayed on track with Jesus, even as he led them down a challenging path.

I want to encourage you today to ask God for eternal perspective about the things you feel the most frustrated and impatient with. We can become like Abraham and Sarah, who ran ahead of God- but it only added to their pain. Alan Kreider uses fermentation as an analogy of how we trust in God during periods of waiting. The fermentation process is imperceptible, and there's no way for us to test what is happening other than to wait and trust. How do we remain faithful in a period of waiting?

**Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up...** We don't journey alone- we walk alongside others. Especially when we are susceptible to sin, we want to lean on the strength and wisdom of others so that we don't wander off on a path that derails us from our walk with God. This is one of the gifts of community! No one walks alone in God's kingdom. Who are you walking with? One of the ways that we build endurance and perseverance is by having others help us discern how to live faithfully in waiting. The way that we persevere in

faith comes in the next verse... **<sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.**

Here's the question that this verse brings up...

### **What is my trajectory in relation to Jesus?**

Am I moving closer to Christ or further away? Many times, we treat faith like something we either have or we don't. But each time God prompts us to take a step, we're faced with a decision- to step out in faith or not. One of the ways that some explain this is with the concept of a bounded set vs a centered set. It might sound confusing at first, but track with me...

- A bounded set works like a fence. You're either in or you're out. We can often think of our faith in Jesus like this- I either have it or I don't.
- A centered set is determined not by fixed boundaries but a center point that you are either getting closer or further away from at any given moment.

In my spiritual journey growing up in the church, I viewed my faith like a bounded set. I figured I believed in Jesus and that was enough. I talked like a Christian and did a lot of Christian activities. But I often missed the point of faith because I rarely surrendered decisions to Jesus. I figured I had the right beliefs and God would figure out the rest. I treated my faith like a bounded set. In college, I stopped pursuing faith in Jesus. I considered myself spiritual, but my spirituality worked a bit like a buffet where I would pick and choose different ideas or beliefs based on what I was in the mood for. Eventually I became friends with some Christians who I came to trust. I loved how accepting they were of me and how open they were to spiritual conversation, even when we didn't agree. When one of them invited me to come to their group, I accepted. One night when I was there, I remember being impacted by a teaching of Jesus that we discussed and decided I would try to do it. Now, around that time, another friend of mine noticed I was going to this group and asked if I considered myself a Christian- I said no. And yet, my trajectory was towards Christ. This was like the centered set. I think both kinds of thinking are helpful in faith. God isn't going to force us to be in His family- we have to make the choice to accept the invitation. But I can be in God's family and still living in disobedience to him, walking away from Christ.

I want to encourage you today to step towards Christ. With a baby in the house, I've been reminded of how the walking process works. At first, we needed to carry our son everywhere. Now he's learned to crawl, and we see him getting closer to walking every day. He's getting ready for those baby steps! Our faith journey begins with others carrying us. Eventually though, it's time to take those baby steps. It comes with a lot of falls- but we persevere and mature. Right now, any time my son makes progress toward walking, we're there cheering him on! And this is what we need to do in the church- cheer one another on as we make progress. Those baby steps lead to more confidence and a lifelong journey of walking with God. In fact, when we become fully mature, we are not just able to walk ourselves, but we can carry others. Let me ask; what is the step that God's calling you to take? Maybe you don't even know what you believe about God- the series starting next week is going to be a great step for you. We've been encouraging those of us who have been walking with God to invite

someone to worship or life group next week. Maybe that even feels a bit uncomfortable, but God wants you to lean in! Maybe you did invite someone, and they said no... don't stop stepping out in faith! God uses your "yes" for His purposes.